

THE IRISH LANGUAGE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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Irish is an integral part of the total joint experience of the island of Ireland. Much of the preceding sections are then applicable to Northern Ireland also. This separate section gives an account of the areas where the northern experience differs. Information is given under the same general headings as in the sections preceding.

THE PRESENT LANGUAGE COMMUNITY

DEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS

There are now no *Gaeltacht* areas left within Northern Ireland (NI) although the urban community of West Belfast would lay claim to such a description, taking into account the range of community institutions they have established over the years – housing estate, shops, schools, daily newspaper, cultural centres, research – together with support services for target groups such as adult learners, preschoolers, youth, and cultural resources in drama and traditional arts. They received some support for that claim in the report of *Coimisiún na Gaeltachta* 2002 which recommended, *inter alia*, the establishment of a Board of Commissioners to monitor the recommendations of the Commission, and which would determine *Gaeltacht* status for communities, a status for which communities outside the traditional regions could also apply. The City Council of Belfast and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) in NI has recently accepted the concept of a *Ceathrú Gaeltachta* (Gaeltacht Quarter) in West Belfast. The same type of request would probably have come from the formerly proposed settlement on 52 acres in Altmore, County Tyrone, which is no longer a live project.

SPEAKERS: CENSUS 1991 AND CENSUS 2001 IN NI

In the 1991 Census, a year in which censuses were taken in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, a total of 142,003 persons in Northern Ireland (not all of whom were Roman Catholic) were returned as having some ability in Irish; 79,012 were returned as being able to speak, read, and write the language. The last previous Census to record language statistics in the six counties which became a separate political entity in 1921 was in 1911, when 28,729 speakers were recorded. In 1911, there were still districts where Irish was community language (*Gaeltacht*) in what was to become Northern Ireland.

Census 1991 then was the first time a language question was included in the Census since Northern Ireland was established as a distinct political entity. The figure of 142,003 then represented approximately 10% (9.45%) of Northern Ireland’s population but, as a proportion of the ‘nationalist’ community, is quite similar to the proportion returned as Irish-speaking in the Republic of Ireland. So also, the northern figure includes a range of competences and commitments to use, and the more active end of the scale may be assumed to include Irish-speaking migrants from Donegal in the Republic of Ireland, natives of Irish-speaking households in Northern Ireland, and a number who have acquired a high competence in Irish as a second language.

NI Census Some knowledge of Irish & % of total population

1991 (three skills: speak, read, write)	142,003 (9.45%)
2001 (four skills: understand, speak, read, write)	167,490 (10.4%)

Comparisons with the results of Census 2001 are not easy since a new element, the passive skill of understanding Irish, was added to the skills of speaking, reading and writing. Nevertheless, it appears that some increase has occurred since 10.4% of the population under Census, or 167,490 persons of a total 1,617,957, gave some affirmative answer. This compares with 142,003 persons in 1991 (9.45%), an increase of 25,457. **Just under 5% (4.64%) of those professing some knowledge of the language possess all four skills. In West Belfast, 11.2% of the total population had all four skills. In the total Belfast District Council area 48.57%, or nearly half of those professing some knowledge, had competence in all skills as had 46.76% in the Derry District Council area and 44.47% in Newry and Mourne District Council area. Many of the other 23 Council areas display the same pattern.** There were almost 13,000 respondents (12,838; 7.7%) who were not Roman Catholic among those returned with knowledge of Irish. (With regard to the Census question on religious affiliation, 40.3% of all respondents returned as Roman Catholic and 45.6% as belonging to the Protestant churches; the remaining 14% did not reply). In general, more women than men had knowledge of Irish

Of those returned, the age break down was as follows.

Census 2001 Northern Ireland Knowledge of Irish: Age Group and Percentage

3-11	12-15	16-24	25-39	40-59	60-74	75+
6.1%	23.8%	16%	10.7%	9%	6.5%	4.9%

Included in the total 167,490 persons with knowledge of Irish, there were some 862 persons returning as belonging to an ethnic group other than White. They comprised Mixed, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Other Asian, Black Caribbean, Black African, Other Black, Chinese, and Other Ethnic Group. In addition, almost 20% of those returning as Irish Travellers had some knowledge of Irish. A parliamentary question at Westminster in March 2007 elicited the official reply that speakers of Chinese languages in NI number some 8,000.

The NI Census 2001 question on Irish referred to both passive and active competence but did not record either frequency or occasions of actual use. At the moment there are no plans to introduce further refinements to the question in future censuses in NI. It is considered that the Continuous Household Survey could be a useful source of data if questions on Irish were added. [Nevertheless, the new Minister at the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure \(DCAL\) remarked in March 2008 in the Assembly that he was in consultation towards a new study of ability and use of Irish in NI in an attempt to clarify census figures.](#)

The population of NI has increased since 2001. It recently stood at 1,710,300 persons. Not altogether surprisingly then, an independent survey conducted by Millward Brown and published in July 2007 for the Committee of the Broadcasting Fund for Irish found that some 17% of the NI population (one in five) were considered to have some competence in Irish. Unlike the rest of Europe, both NI and the Republic have a high proportion of their population in the younger age groups. In NI, up to 60% of people are under forty years of age. This factor holds implications for education and for language planning.

ATTITUDES: REPUBLIC OF IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

Self-reported competence in Irish in census returns is generally taken as an indication of fairly positive attitudes towards the language. Negative answers such as not stating, or the use of ‘never’, may, in some instances, be an indication of less supportive attitudes.

The first professional survey in the Republic was carried out in 1973 with Government support and using academic and technical expertise from the United States. This Committee on Language Attitudes Research (CLAR), replicated in 1983 by *ITÉ* (Linguistics Institute of Ireland), shows a high level of societal support for Irish as an ethnic symbol, support for State action for the language, for competent teaching of the language in the education system, and for policies for the *Gaeltacht*. [An IMS \(Irish Marketing Surveys\) report in 1988 for the State board, Bord na Gaeilge, on Irish in the education system, showed that 71% were satisfied with the then current arrangements while a significant minority within that group demanded improvements. Both in this professionally conducted survey and in a previous newspaper poll, as well as in the 1983 *ITÉ* survey, a significant number of respondents were quite confused as to the true situation of the Irish language when described as ‘compulsory’; up to 40% were of the false opinion that failure in the Leaving Certificate examination was due solely to failure in Irish, or were unclear on the facts.](#)

In Northern Ireland, surveys had shown that approximately 23% of the Protestant community would support Irish in the education system.

ALL-IRELAND OMNIBUS SURVEY 2000

A question on public perceptions of Irish added to the Northern Ireland and Irish Social Omnibus Surveys in November 2000 by the new *Foras na Gaeilge* gives much interesting information from which the following is extracted. The percentages of agreement with the propositions are given by jurisdiction.

Irish Social Omnibus Survey 2000: % Agreement with some statements

Government action for Irish	Republic of Ireland %	Northern Ireland %
Does too much	4%	20%
Does enough	36%	23%
Does too little	15%	15%
Does the right things	33%	17%
Does the wrong things	9%	23%
Policy Choices		
Competent teaching of Irish	48%	24%
Policies for the <i>Gaeltacht</i>	24%	48%
Bilingual State		
English dominant	41%	19%
Irish dominant	03%	01%
Public Services for Irish Speakers		
As right	68%	22%
Responsibility for Irish, job of		
Voluntary organisations not State	21%	43%
Preserve Irish as heritage not necessarily as spoken language		
	24%	24%
Irish-medium schools on demand		
	70%	45%

Events colour perceptions and attitudes. These perceptions are now seven years old. Replication might be useful as a pointer to the pace of change or otherwise, particularly considering the attitudes given expression by some members during debate at both district council level in some areas and in the new devolved Assembly of NI.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE NI RESEARCH 2001

Even more interesting were the results of more extensive research which was published in late 2001, having been commissioned by the Policy Evaluation and Research Unit of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), on behalf of the Linguistic Diversity Branch of the Department, on establishing the demand for services and activities in the Irish language in NI. From the qualitative data derived from interviews and focus groups, four attitudes or distinct viewpoints emerged. These were categorised as Devotees, Sympathisers, Tolerators, and Opposers. The quantitative data were based on returns from four questions asked of a representative sample of men and women aged 18 and over in the Social Omnibus Survey conducted in the period March-April 2000. Respondents were also asked to give religious affiliation. Overall, attitudes were quite divided. Although at this stage over 30% of Protestants had fairly positive attitudes towards official policies for Irish, a very large majority still had problems with the notion.

Question One

The first question dealt with respondents' assessment of which of four possible attitudes best described their own attitude to the provision of Irish language versions of 13 official matters, which included written material: leaflets/reports/other documents/application forms/websites; communication: written/oral/telephone; registration of births/marriages/deaths; interviews. Taking responses across the 13 areas, the results may be interpreted as follows.

Personal Attitude to Official Provision of Irish-language Forms/Documentation

Description of Attitude	Overall Percentage	Approx.%Prot	%Cath	%Other
Provided as right	7.7-9.3	15	78	7.5
On request ¹	44.8-50.7	47.7	39.6	12.5
On request ²	9.7-12.5	68	13.5	17.6
Never in any circumstances	20.7-25	82.6	9.3	7.4
Do not know/ Do not answer	8.9-11	59.2	28.1	11.66

(1) to those specifically wanting it

(2) only if not literate in English

Question Two

The second question on the use of Irish language versions of signage in public buildings and places elicited a sharp divergence of attitude between Protestant and Catholic respondents. A proportion of respondents answered each section.

Personal Attitude to Provision of Irish-language Signage in Public Places

Description of Attitude	No. of Respondents	%Prot	%Cath	%Neither
Provided as right/ matter of equality	130	18	76	7
In circumstances where majority in contact in favour	452	46	38	15
Never in any circumstances	278	87	7	6

Question Three

Answers to question three, on the use of Irish language advertising by Government, were similarly divided by community.

Personal Attitude to Provision of Irish-language Advertising by Government

Description of Attitude	No. of Respondents	%Prot	%Cath	%Neither
Provided as right/ matter of equality	160	19	68	13
Only to specialist Irish language media	378	50	37	13
Never in any circumstances	278	85	7	8

Question Four

Question four asked respondents to indicate in rank order the three priorities in relation to Irish which they would choose from a list of 16 Government activities.

Personal Ranking of Priorities in relation to Irish-language Activity by Government

	Activity	Rank Order
Protestants	Don't know	1
	Not in favour of any on list	2
	Signage	3
	Government information leaflets	4
	Registration of births/marriages/deaths	5
Catholics	Signage	1
	Don't know	2
	Government information leaflets	3
	Registration of births/marriages/deaths	4
	Election voting cards	5

Some degree of convergence of views across communities is registered in the section replies below, albeit somewhat grudgingly. Overall, however, attitudes are quite divided. While clearly over 30% of Protestants have fairly positive attitudes towards official policies for Irish, a very large majority still have problems with the notion.

Summary of Survey Replies

Attitude towards provision in Irish replies	% More positive replies		% More negative replies	
	Protestant	Catholic	Protestant	Catholic
13 Official matters	31.35	58.8	75.3	11.4
Public signage	32	57	87	7
Government advertising	34.5	52.5	85	7
Average	32.6	56.1	82.4	8.46

EVALUATION OF LANGUAGE COURSES FOR CIVIL SERVANTS (NI)

No services can be provided unless staff with language skills in Irish are available. Courses in basic skills for beginners were run by the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety during 2000. They were held at lunch time once a week for a period of 10 weeks, two in Belfast and one in Derry and were evaluated by both the Department and by Queen's University. The attitudes towards the courses were very revealing of attitudes pertaining in the environment. While the courses themselves were considered enjoyable, not long enough, or fairly difficult, the attitudes of the participants varied from an acceptance that Irish 'was newly respectable' or that this was 'the way things were going' and that it was necessary 'to keep up with the times' to a reluctance to tell colleagues because of underlying sensitivities, although this could have been mitigated somewhat by the fact that the courses were, in fact, being officially organised by the Department itself.

BILINGUALISM IN SOME PUBLIC FORA

These ambivalences were highlighted in recent events (Autumn 2004). There were objections from Irish speakers when a BBC radio commentator spoke over the maiden speech by a newly elected Member of the European Parliament from NI, given in Irish, on the grounds that it was necessary to ensure explanation for all listeners. A member of another political party, recently retired from office, was a guest presenter on a BBC talk show. She began with a bilingual greeting which elicited no small degree of adverse comment from certain listeners. At Queen's University, Belfast, the Students' Union has, over the years, conducted an ongoing battle with the authorities on the question of bilingual Irish-English information packs and signage. Such materials are seen as a cause of offence to unionists. The latest demand from the authorities is that the Union produce two information packs: Irish/English and Ulster Scots/English. These problems have led to a call for unambivalent clarity from the Westminster Parliament in relation to the implementation of the Charter of the Council of

Europe for both Irish and Ulster Scots. For the same reasons, Irish speakers point to the facts that from 2005 a British passport will include Welsh beside English and French and that it is intended to have up to 150 languages on the exchange dealing with 999 calls in London, Gaelic Ireland/Scotland having been listed among them. The fairly predictable reactions of the generality of politicians from different parties up to quite recently, nationalist and unionist, is evident in various public *fora*. It is illustrated in the sections below on local authorities and the proposed Language Act.

IDENTITY AND EQUALITY

Churches Peace Education Programme

All the churches in NI are trustees of the Churches Peace Education Programme: Catholic, Protestant churches, Orthodox. A report on the operation of the programme 1978–2004 was prepared with research from the two denominational teacher education institutions, St. Mary’s and Stranmillis. While advocating the continued involvement of the churches, even as an obligation, in peace education, the deep identity crisis still pertaining in NI was also revealed and how the conflict about identity is still very potent.

Most commentators point out the connection between identity and linguistic matters.

The economy: poverty, unemployment and religious background

By the latter half of 2006, official sources reported unemployment in NI at 4.4%, lower than in the UK (5.5% average) and than in the EU (8.1%), although Derry and Strabane remained black spots. The economy was slowly improving, manufacturing growth being ahead of the UK and business survival higher. Nevertheless, the economy was still highly dependent on public finances, up to 30% of employment was in the public sector, and the continuing stalemate in the political process at that time was impeding economic development. A year later, the average unemployment rate varied between 3.4% and 3.8% (UK 5.4%; EU 6.7%; ROI 4.7%). By November 2007, after six months of devolved government, a report from First Trust Bank was able to confirm that economic growth was continuing, despite some problems, particularly given the low rate of unemployment.

A recent report (March 2008), conducted at Queen’s University Belfast (QUB) for More 4 News, compared the current socio-economic situation to that of some 10 years ago. The findings revealed interesting social changes.

	% Higher Qualifications		% Unemployed
	Catholics	Protestants	Catholics
1997	17%	17%	12%
2007	31%	25%	6%

The authors report that, despite the fall in unemployment for Catholics, they are still more likely to be unemployed than Protestants. Nevertheless, with regard to numbers in the workforce, Catholic workers rose by 3% and Protestant workers fell by 5% during the period. In addition, while the Catholic working class were more deprived than the Protestant working class across a range of indicators, deprivation among Catholics was being addressed at a much faster rate. The percentage of children in Catholic maintained schools fell by 30% over the period. As noted above, the school population in general has declined leading to new planning measures. The conclusion reached in the QUB/More 4 News report was that, in general terms, it is the Catholic population that has gained more from peace since: they are more likely to have a degree; less likely to leave school without a qualification; are reducing child poverty at a faster rate. It could also be argued that perhaps they are making good use of the conditions attaching to peace.

Equality is one of the cornerstones of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998. However, that this had not been yet achieved in employment was clearly demonstrated in research from the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) published in September 2006, *Equality in Northern Ireland: the Rhetoric and the Reality*, which reported the following. Catholics were still under-represented at the top levels of the civil service and in the work force of the largest private employers. The official Taskforce on Protestant Working Class Communities tended to sectarianise the challenge of working class poverty. Catholics still suffered disadvantage. The poor of both Protestant and Catholic communities were not receiving the assistance to help them participate in the developing economy.

These are factors that have the potential to lead to polarised positions on other aspects of communal life, the cultural and linguistic, without strong and sensitive leadership.

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISION FOR IRISH

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The United Kingdom does not have a written constitution. In Northern Ireland there is no statutory definition of an official language. Currently, the sole formally designated status for Irish in NI lies in references on actions in some pieces of legislation and in certain sections of the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, to which the UK Government has signed up. These latter, however, are not incorporated into domestic legislation. In Northern Ireland, the position of the Irish language, although improving, has still a lower public status than, for example, that of the Welsh language in Wales or of Scottish Gaelic in Scotland. References to Irish in the Good Friday (Belfast, 1998) Agreement and particularly the promises in the St. Andrews (2006) Agreement are now being used to ensure a Language Act for Irish in NI as soon as possible.

The six counties of Northern Ireland became a separate political entity in 1921. In Irish history, the province of Ulster comprised nine counties. From 1921 to 1972, the Ulster Unionist Party ruled without a break. The Irish language and its speakers were treated with official hostility and negativity. Voluntary organisations, however, continued to work for the language either in an all-Ireland or solely Northern Ireland context. Education was the one area in which State support for the language (as curricular area in those educational institutions which chose to offer it—largely independent maintained schools run by Roman Catholic religious orders) had been established before partition, and remained, until the 1980s, the only area within Northern Ireland for which statutory support continued although reducing gradually. This situation began to change in the 1980s largely under direct rule from Westminster. Funding for Irish-medium education was first granted, reluctantly, in 1983, but the changes now stretched beyond the education system. Influential figures began to argue for a policy which embraced the principle of cultural diversity, and the Irish language became one of the touchstones of the success of this new and, in the context of Northern Ireland, almost revolutionary approach. Funding began to be made available for a number of Irish language projects in the late 1980s. Broadcasting in Irish was banned until 1982 and no funding was made available for the Irish language arts until the 1990s. The NI State-funded organisation, the *Ultach Trust (Iontaobhas Ultach)*, with a Board of Trustees of almost equal numbers of Protestants and Catholics, was founded in 1989 to promote the Irish language throughout the entire community in Northern Ireland. Research and publication on issues pertaining to Irish, information, and liaising between government and language activists are among its functions. It is now funded as one of the eight organisations listed in the schedule contained in the act establishing the Irish language section of the all-Ireland/island implementation body for language, *Foras na Gaeilge Act 1999*.

REPORTS 1990s

During the 1990s several groups produced reports on the situation of Irish in Northern Ireland *vis-à-vis* officialdom. The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ), in its 1993 report, considered that the Government had no real policy of promoting bilingualism. Ten years and several improvements later, in 2003, the Report of the Committee of Experts (COMEX) on the implementation of the Council of Europe Charter remarked that, *In contrast to Wales, both Scotland and Northern Ireland still have basic needs as regards the development of language policy*, and also that, in common with both Welsh and *Gàidhlig*, *more needs to be done in terms of coherent policy-making and planning, including the allocation of adequate resources*, (Chapter 3, Findings: B and G). A more recent (2007) report from COMEX lays particular emphasis on education.

In a 1997 report on rights within the UK, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the UN found it unjustified that Irish in Northern Ireland did not receive the same degree of financial support, and status, as was accorded to the Welsh and Scottish Gaelic languages in the UK. The British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body was established in 1990 and extended in 2001 to include the new Welsh Assembly, the NI Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the States of Guernsey and Jersey, as well as the Tynwald (Parliament) of the Isle of Man, with the purpose of consulting together on certain issues. Report number 44 of April 1996 from Committee 'D' of the Body on North-South

Co-operation in the Arts, in Culture and in Sport made many references to Irish and to policies still requiring implementation.

SOME POSITIVE SIGNS

However, until 1998, NI Government policy continued to be entirely reactive or concessionary, and can be summed up in the following statement from the then existing official Central Community Relations Unit made at a conference which was organised in Belfast in 1995 by *Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge*, the Assembly of Irish Language Organisations, based in Dublin.

The Government recognises that the Irish language is perceived by many people in Northern Ireland as an important part of their cultural heritage. It respects the special importance of Irish, encourages interest in it, and highlights its contribution to the cultural heritage of the whole community.

What this means in practical terms is that Government will respond positively, where practicable, to soundly based requests for assistance... The second practical manifestation is the removal of unnecessary obstacles to the wider use of the language, e.g. the recent repeal of the 1949 legislation on street names.

This repeal, and Article 11 of the Local Government Order (Northern Ireland) 1995, was probably the first positive legislative reference for Irish in NI. It refers, however, only to the erection of street names in 'English and any other language' and residents' views prevail in the case of street signs. The other reference to Irish in the same year is contained in the Children's Order 1995, with regard to the safety and protection of children in any institutions or under the care of adults.

THE BELFAST (GOOD FRIDAY) AGREEMENT 1998

The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement of April 1998, given below, shows a dramatic change in emphasis, where the Government resolves to 'take resolute action to promote the language'. This is clear acknowledgement of the duty to promote the language pro-actively and is a massive advance, although full results still remain to be seen. The relevant section of the Agreement, which has the legal status of an international treaty, contains a reference also to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Paragraph 3

All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.

Paragraph 4

In the context of active consideration currently being given to the UK signing the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the British government will in particular in relation to the Irish language, where appropriate and where people so desire it:

- *take resolute action to promote the language;*
- *facilitate and encourage the use of the language in speech and writing in public and private life where there is appropriate demand;*
- *seek to remove, where possible, restrictions which would discourage or work against the maintenance or development of the language;*
- *make provision for liaising with the Irish language community, representing their views to public authorities and investigating complaints;*
- *place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education in line with current provision for integrated education;*
- *explore urgently with the relevant British authorities, and in co-operation with the Irish broadcasting authorities, the scope for achieving more widespread availability of *Teilifís na Gaeilge* in Northern Ireland;*
- *seek more effective ways to encourage and provide financial support for Irish language film and television production in Northern Ireland; and*
- *encourage the parties to secure agreement that this commitment will be sustained by a new Assembly in a way which takes account of the desires and sensitivities of the community.*

CURRENT POLITICAL INITIATIVES

Events were held towards commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement signed on 10 April 1998. In late May 2008, Queen's University Belfast held the Mitchell Conference at which many political figures gave their assessments. Major international politicians attended other events. The site of the Battle of the Boyne was officially opened. The *Taoiseach* included the historic agreement in his address to the US Congress. However, the most significant political step may be the establishment of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement by order of both Houses of the *Oireachtas* in Dublin in September 2007. The Joint Committee is composed of a Select Committee from each House, ordered on 23 October in the *Dáil* and on 24 October in the *Seanad*. The Orders of Reference include issues arising from Ireland's role as signatory; the consideration of ongoing developments in the implementation of the Agreement; any proposals or related matters referred to the Committee by *Dáil Éireann*. The striking aspect of this Committee is the invited participation of NI MPs elected to Westminster, although without the right to vote or to move motions or amendments. This is the first time for their having such a role in the workings of the *Oireachtas*. The first meeting on 22 November 2007 was attended by four MPs, two each from the parties *Sinn Féin* and SDLP. Unionist MPs did not accept the invitation to participate; their interest may lie more with the later St. Andrews Agreement. Nevertheless, the Committee could be counted as part of 'the most exciting chapter ever in the history of the island of Ireland', as the President of Ireland referred to the new Northern Ireland Executive of May 2007 in her Longford lecture in London on 23 November 2007. She also sought an end 'to the embedded culture of sectarianism'.

NEW STRUCTURES

An Foras Teanga

A second stage of accommodation in the peace process was reached on the 18th of December 1998. For language, the most significant development was the agreement to set up a statutory cross-border or all-island implementation body, *An Foras Teanga*, to promote both the Irish language and Ulster-Scots. This is a single body with two separate parts operationally independent, the part for Irish entitled *Foras na Gaeilge*, having 16 members equally drawn from North and South and from differing political persuasions. Together with the 5 other North/South implementation bodies, and other bodies set up under the Good Friday Agreement 1998, following on the passage of the British-Irish Act of March 1999, *An Foras Teanga* became fully operational on 2 December 1999, the date when power was devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive Committee of Ministers. The North/South implementation bodies come under the control of the North/South Ministerial Council which has its headquarters in Armagh. However, due to the volatility of the political context, *An Foras Teanga*, as one of the six implementation bodies, found itself on a care and maintenance basis for most of its existence. The members of the second board had to have their term extended for one year from mid December 2005 as a temporary measure, because of suspended institutions at that time. This was repeated in December 2006, but in a more hopeful political climate.

The Northern Ireland Assembly 2007

The Assembly is a consensual body, not the traditional government and opposition arrangement. However, since the Assembly went through stormy periods including suspension and subsequent direct rule, Irish language affairs had not developed as hoped. The uneasy political background to the 30 year long peace process has been described as 'From Sunningdale 1973 to Hillsborough 2003', as each effort at inclusive agreement was painfully reached, and breached, but some progress made. On 11 February 2000, the Secretary of State for NI suspended the power sharing institutions as a result of the Ulster Unionists stepping down from the executive at Stormont, with the result that the language agency could not meet again for four months until the Assembly and Executive were re-convened on 30 May 2000. In August and September of 2001, two 24 hour suspensions took place to enable further time for solution to be reached on new problems. Assembly elections had been deferred for months at a time during 2003 although finally held. After three and a half further years of negotiation, and another election, the Secretary of State for NI introduced legislation at Westminster, on 20 April 2006, with the intention of restoring the NI institutions which until then had functioned under Ministers, Under-Secretaries, appointed by Westminster. The date of 15 May 2006 saw the first meeting of the NI

Assembly since it had once more been suspended on 14 October 2002. The parties then had until November 2006 to decide whether devolved government or direct rule from Westminster was to be the future for NI. If no agreement were reached on power sharing, suspension of the Assembly would follow and no further salaries or allowances would be paid to members elected to that Assembly. The Northern Secretary was given further powers, among them the discretion to delay or stay the next Assembly elections. The St. Andrews Agreement was reached in October 2006 leading eventually to elections on 7 March 2007. After intense discussions, the elections led to an agreement, reached on Sunday 25 March during proximity talks between senior officials of *Sinn Féin* and the DUP (Democratic Unionist Party), and announced on the initial target date of 26 March. This political agreement was in relation to the timing, setting up and working of the institutions of devolved government, not immediately but by Tuesday 8 May, 2007. Emergency legislation was enacted at Westminster for the new delayed date for power sharing in NI.

The new Assembly is composed of 108 members, 6 from each of 18 constituencies, and an array of political parties: Democratic Unionist Party or DUP (36); *Sinn Féin* (28); Ulster Unionist Party or UUP (18); Social Democratic Labour Party or SDLP (16); Alliance Party (7); Progressive Unionist Party or PUP (1); Green Party (1); Independent (1), Omagh Hospital. Members are designated as MLA, Member of the Legislative Assembly. The First Minister and Deputy First Minister are from the two largest parties from the unionist and nationalist sides. There is a four party Executive of twelve including the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (DUP 5; *Sinn Féin* 4; UUP 2; SDLP 1). A Committee, chaired by a member of a party other than that of the minister, is attached to all departments.

As a devolved government, the Assembly does not have control over all areas, although education and training, arts, culture, language and economic development are among those devolved, as well as foreign policy (but only insofar as it relates to cross-border matters under the N/S Ministerial Council). The Northern Ireland Office (NIO), first established in 1972, has responsibility for some reserved matters. Westminster, for example, sets tax levels as a matter of overall UK economic policy, a matter of disappointment in relation to the first budget introduced to the new Assembly in October 2007. There had been arguments from the business sector particularly to reduce the rate of corporation tax to the level of the ROI in order to attract inward investment and perhaps have an all-island approach in some areas of the economy. Much had been expected from the Varney report commissioned by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. [With the functioning of the Assembly now continuing in a normal fashion, it is expected that responsibility for policing will revert to the NI Executive in 2008. There is speculation that since the responsibilities of Secretary of State for NI were merged with those of Wales, a single new post may be created in the future for the three devolved regions and that this may be titled Secretary of State for the Nations, to include Scotland also.](#)

Northern Ireland Devolution Day, 8 May 2007, was celebrated in a most open and conciliatory fashion. On 11 May the DUP First Minister and the *Taoiseach* of the Republic of Ireland walked together the site of the Battle of the Boyne 1690, dear to unionist Ulster. However, the tone of subsequent debate in the Assembly has not been so conciliatory.

Language Diversity Branch (DCAL)

The structure set up to deal in general with the languages of Northern Ireland was the Language Diversity Branch (1998), attached to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), with the purpose of providing advice, support and guidance. Officialdom in NI does not lack for advice since advice is also cited among the functions of *Foras na Gaeilge*. However, providing advice, advice being requested, advice being acted upon, these are three very different things. The responsibilities of the Branch extend not only to Irish and Ulster-Scots, but also to ethnic minority languages and sign language. To some extent, this amalgamation echoes still the reservations of the CAJ expressed in a way in its 1993 report on Irish in NI: that the funding of Irish language development projects through the Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU) at that time was indicative of an official attitude that had difficulty according Irish its particular historic and contemporary place as indigenous community language. In the 2008–2011 Budget, DCAL states:

Overall aim:

- to create a confident, creative, informed and vibrant community through the objective
- to protect, nurture and grow the cultural capital for today and tomorrow.

Other public agencies

Other public agencies may also impact on language matters: the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, established in 1990 and funded by the EU and the British Government; the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, established in 1999; the Equality Commission (a commitment of the Belfast Agreement 1998), into which was subsumed in 1999 four existing bodies – the Fair Employment Commission, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality, and the NI Disability Council. Valuing and promoting respect for diversity is cited in the mission of the Equality Commission.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BELFAST (GOOD FRIDAY) AGREEMENT 1998**STRUCTURES FOR IRISH-MEDIUM EDUCATION**

While the Education Reform Order (Northern Ireland) 1989 very partially answered the issues raised with regard to the position of the Irish language as an object of study in education, it is Part IX of the Education Order (Northern Ireland) 1998 which gives legal underpinning to Irish-medium education. This was defined as education provided in an Irish-speaking school, that is a school in which, other than English and Irish, more than one half of the subjects which are compulsory contributory subjects and including Religion, are taught (wholly or partly) in Irish, and “school” includes part of a school. The duty to encourage and to facilitate the development of Irish-medium education was clearly stated. Discretion was given to the Education Department under this Order to pay grants to bodies, to grant approval to new schools but upon terms and conditions determined by the Department.

With the coming into power in 1999 of the democratically elected Assembly and the appointment of Ministers with devolved powers, policy changes with regard to Irish became immediately apparent, particularly in education. On foot of the 1998 Education Order, the Department established and grant-aided in 2000 two support structures for Irish-medium education: *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta* (Council for Irish-medium Education), described officially as an ‘associated agency’, which represents the views of the various, mostly voluntary, organisations in the field, provides advice, and produces plans; *Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta* (Trust for Irish-medium Education), a fundraising trust, though in receipt of some official funds also to disburse on Irish-medium education and whose trustees are appointed by the Department and the *Comhairle*. In addition, teacher training for this Irish-medium sector was entrusted to St. Mary’s University College of Education in Belfast, which now also houses *An tÁisaonad* (Resources Unit), the agency set up to provide materials for the Irish-medium sector.

BROADCASTING

In the Joint Declaration issued by the British and Irish Governments on 1 April 2003, the British Government reiterated that it would ‘continue to discharge all its commitments under the (Belfast) Agreement in respect of the Irish language’. In relation to broadcasting, the British Government undertook to establish a fund for financial support for Irish language film and television production, once the business plan being developed became available. In addition, both the British and Irish Governments undertook to address the various obstacles to the reception of *TG4* in Northern Ireland.

CHARTER FOR RMLS: FIRST REPORT

Following on the reference to it in the Good Friday Agreement of April 1998, the UK Government gave a public commitment in June of that year to sign and ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (of the Council of Europe) and to apply Part III (*Measures to promote use in public life*) to Irish in Northern Ireland. In March 2001, the UK Government ratified the Charter with respect to Irish by accepting 36 actions, one more than the mandatory 35 from a long menu list, in general accepting the weakest action in each case, across the following domains, which are Articles 8 to 14 of the Charter.

- Education (8)
- Judicial Authorities (9)
- Administrative Authorities and Public Services (10)
- Media (11)
- Cultural Activities and Facilities (12)
- Economic and Social Life (13)
- Transfrontier Exchanges (14)

These actions came into effect in July 2001. Oversight of implementation is certified through annual reports to the Council of Europe from ratifying states and through independent reports from a Committee of Experts (COMEX) who visit and consult with both State authorities and representatives of the language community in question. It is the UK Government which has final responsibility for ensuring implementation on the languages on whose behalf the UK has signed the Charter. The initial periodic report of the UK Government on the application of the Charter was published in July 2002. This was followed by a questionnaire and visit to NI in the case of Irish from COMEX in January 2003. Their report, which was sent first to the State for comment, was adopted in August 2003 and includes the UK reply to points raised as well as the recommendations of the Experts. In advance of that visit, a comprehensive report and commentary on implementation with respect to Irish was prepared and published by the voluntary sector umbrella group *Pobal* (Community). It shows, *inter alia*, the problems of implementation throughout the State apparatus, both central and local, an issue which still continues albeit with some improvements which include the introduction of bilingual policies in some local authorities.

Administrative Authorities and Public Services (Article 10 of the Charter)

Various obstacles were presented by some official authorities during the adaptation process. Some local authorities considered themselves outside the remit of the Charter and delayed implementation while seeking official clarity. The Equality Commission was invoked in other cases, perhaps because it had been quoted as informing employers that the speaking of Irish among workers should be forbidden on grounds of discrimination against co-workers. This interpretation was firmly answered at a conference on law and language, organised by the British Council, at Stormont, on the grounds that, in fact, such a policy discriminated in favour of English.

Article 10 of the Charter, *Administrative Authorities and Public Services*, is based on the permitted uses of Irish between citizens and administrative authorities and public services. It is noted in the COMEX report that general Codes of Courtesy for Irish are available. As an interim measure towards the provision of an oral service, a voice-mail facility has been provided by central authorities, although it is not entirely functional, and an audit of employees with Irish being conducted. Applications and other written documents are processed through Irish when submitted in Irish. Some departments have a policy of replying in Irish to all documents received in Irish and all State bodies have produced in Irish a range of the more important documents of public interest, from the Programme for Government to a customer care guide.

In the NI Assembly (when not suspended), Irish has been used by members and a full-time official employed for translation and interpretation. The Speaker launched a dictionary of parliamentary terms (commissioned by *Foras na Gaeilge*) in 2002.

Other Articles of the Charter

In general, with regard to the eight Articles in which actions were to be taken on behalf of the Irish language in NI by the UK authorities, the inaugural report of the Committee of Experts was, in the main, favourable as their comments, given across the domains, reveal.

The overall comment of the Committee of Experts was that it 'observed that the NI administration is thorough in its work to fulfil its undertakings in relation to Irish. The work is taken seriously and, despite some shortcomings, the authorities are taking steps to improve the situation. However, sufficient information has not always been available to the Committee of Experts since the movement for protecting Irish is a recent one, developing rapidly'. They conclude that 'At this stage, therefore, it would be difficult to propose any concrete recommendations for the Irish language', (Chapter 3, Findings: F). The Committee, however, did find itself, on the other hand, in a position to make

recommendations for Welsh and *Gáidhlig*. With regard to cultural life in NI, they noted ‘shortcomings in the services in Irish ... particularly regarding television’, (Findings: H). Interestingly, in the domain of economic activity, in comparison with Wales, ‘On a smaller scale, similar activities are being initiated in relation to Irish. Given the fundamental importance of a sustainable economy to the survival of minority language communities, these measures are welcome first steps’, (Findings: K).

UK response to the first report of the Committee of Experts

In its invited comments, published as Appendix II to the Experts’ Report, the UK Government itself made some interesting observations, among them the following.

- *The UK Government attaches great importance to the protection and promotion of regional or minority languages ... as part of promoting human rights, rule of law and pluralist democracy...*
- *...it is accepted that co-ordination between London and the regional capitals could be improved as a means of sharing best practice and forming a more coherent strategy on language protection across the whole of the UK ... is currently considering a variety of ways to establish a mechanism to monitor compliance with the Charter and intends to have something in place before the next Periodical Report*
- *The UK Government is also aware that there is an issue regarding the position of the Charter in UK law. Consultations are currently taking place on language Acts for some of the languages covered by the Charter.*

On the issue of broadcasting, (Article 11, Media), reference was made by the UK to the pilot training scheme for producers which, depending on the evaluation of the first course, might be organised a second time, and also to the vigorous efforts being pursued in conjunction with the Irish Government to find solutions to the then technical and copyright problems of the extension into NI of *TG4*. A ‘wide ranging review’ of the BBC’s Royal Charter was also mentioned. In the event, little emerged from this review to the benefit of Irish.

The weaknesses of application of Article 9 on judicial matters were to be examined with regard to the use of Irish in the courts. Again, later events displayed the weakness of this position.

Of interest also is the official reference to the ongoing discussions between Departments in NI and local interests on the question of ‘the establishment of a *Gaeltacht* Quarter in West Belfast, based on Irish language, culture and traditions’. *Ceathrú Gaeltachta Bhéal Feirste* is rapidly taking shape with the constant addition of further community agencies and facilities, including employment related initiatives. To the disappointment of the steering committee, however, their efforts were not recognised in the regeneration plan for Belfast in late 2005. It was eventually late 2006 before this innovative venture got off the ground.

Initial implementation of the Charter: Summary

On foot of the various stages of this reporting process, the final Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the application of the Charter by the UK, adopted in March 2004, set out seven areas of priority concerning the three main Celtic languages. Only one of these priorities applied to Irish. This sought ‘to improve the public service television provision and facilitate the broadcasting of private radio in Irish’. Other comments are reported below under the various sections of the Charter.

Nevertheless, despite weaknesses, with the advent of the Charter, there does now exist a type of legislative framework which can be invoked in favour of Irish in NI, and the outline of a supportive structural mechanism of which the results are becoming more evident. Suspended political institutions may have delayed the process since eleven Government Departments, twenty-six district councils and a significant number of associated agencies are involved in implementation. In addition, the NI Office (NIO) is the mechanism for those parts of the Charter retained by the UK Government, such as Broadcasting, as an element of Media.

The ongoing changes in the political context are evident in different ways. The City of Belfast had its first Catholic mayor in 1998. The Official Opening of the annual festival of Irish culture, *Oireachtas na Gaeilge*, was celebrated in the City Hall in 1998, making history. Nowadays, a DUP Deputy Mayor can welcome participants to the World Dancing Championships in Irish and Ian Paisley, MP, MEP, MLA, (now First Minister), can support a call for making Irish a full official

working language of the EU in the Parliament in Brussels. In the past, it was Derry which used to have what was considered a slightly more liberal tradition in its Guildhall.

Publicity on the Charter

Pobal (1998) describes itself as the umbrella organisation for the Irish-speaking community in NI. It accomplishes this through being a representative partnership that provides strategic direction and a democratic forum for the groups which have created the North's thriving range of social, economic, artistic and educational projects. Its aims are to promote all aspects of development for Irish within an inclusive framework; to foster new collaborative approaches between the Irish language community and statutory, voluntary and government agencies, liaising and working in partnership with new governmental structures; to enable the Irish language community to develop coherent development strategies; to provide a democratic and representative forum for discussion among Irish language groups. Until 2001, when it received core funding from *Foras na Gaeilge*, *Pobal* operated on a voluntary capacity. It has played a major role in publicising the rights and duties arising from the Charter.

Several public events were organised to enhance official and public awareness of the implications of the Charter. Linguistic law has been the subject matter of several conferences, with renowned international speakers, organised by the group *Pobal*, representative of Irish language interests, since its establishment. A conference on promoting diversity was held by *Pobal* in September 2000 in Belfast with a panel representing a wide range of official bodies. A symposium on language and law in Northern Ireland took place in Stormont Parliamentary Buildings in February 2003 at the invitation of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State representing Westminster at DCAL during the suspension of the Assembly. In March 2003, *Pobal* and *Foras na Gaeilge* ran an information day for Councillors on the duties of the Charter and on the legal implications arising. A wide range of representatives attended. *Pobal* has also issued guidelines for public bodies on the implementation of a bilingual policy and is available for training courses for personnel.

CHARTER FOR RMLS: SECOND REPORT

Pobal

Despite advances, however, problems remained. These are highlighted once more in the Second Submission made by *Pobal* to the Committee of Experts on the Charter with regard to implementation 2002-2005. Apart from specific comments on various services, the overarching issues highlighted by *Pobal* include the following:

- *clarification of duties by UK government so that other bodies are clear on theirs and matters are not batted to and fro between NI and Westminster offices; since the Charter is an international instrument and not part of UK domestic law, legal advice is that the necessary legislation must be introduced to require local authorities to carry out the provisions of the Charter*
- *necessity for the Committee of Experts 'to take a lead role in resolution of the legislative and policy inertia that surrounds the Irish language'*
- *audit of problem areas with a view to solution*
- *provision of guidelines to official bodies with regard to implementation*
- *active communications exercise to inform citizens of their language rights under the Charter*
- *comparison of Welsh (52) and Gáidhlig (38) with the minimalist approach taken with regard to Irish (36 of the weakest choices under the 8 Articles of the Charter)*
- *lack of a coherent integrated approach to implementation*
- *lack, or lack of continuity, of funding for NGOs.*

A survey conducted by *Pobal* on awareness of existing language rights guaranteed by the Charter was not very encouraging:

- *78% of respondents were of the opinion that the UK government was not fulfilling its duties under the Charter*
- *88% were of the opinion that they were not fulfilling their duty of actively informing the public of their rights*
- *45% would have had no knowledge of their rights without Pobal*
- *36.5% had received the information from the media*

- *only one person had received information from a public body (a health service)*
- *97.6% had sought services in Irish from authorities at different levels but 64% had never written a letter in Irish to the authorities and 98% had never requested an interpreter at meetings, situations to which they had a right*
- *only 7% used the voicemail service available for Irish speakers.*

Some case studies published by *Pobal* in their report deal with lack of services, particularly for children with special needs. Recommendations are made by *Pobal* under each of the eight Articles of the Charter. All would require the UK government to sign up to stronger measures under each article. Implementation would also require more personnel with Irish language skills.

However, some progress has been made in the view of *Pobal* and there is a commitment to assisting staff in public bodies to carry out the duties that are now part of their remit.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL)

The contribution of DCAL to the second UK report was comprehensive if somewhat repetitive of the first report. Since the Charter and subsequent reports deal with both Irish and, to a lesser extent, Ulster-Scots, the main points in relation to Irish are as follows. Future reports from the authorities could be better laid out and more clearly arranged to show problems and progress on them from report to report:

- *an Interdepartmental Charter Implementation Group (ICIG) continues to co-ordinate activity. It is chaired by DCAL and is very representative, including Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise, NI Courts, as well as all departments and the NIO; it has agreed a comprehensive paper on Guidance for all implementing bodies which includes a template Code of language Courtesy which has been translated into Irish; DCAL, as the lead department, has provided a statement on its own language policy which is set out in very practical terms to deal with communication through various media between the department and the citizen*

(It is the view of *Pobal* that this Interdepartmental Group does not meet often enough to be more proactive in their approach).

- *DCAL supplies practical assistance (translation) and advice to official bodies requesting it; it supports the Translation Advisory Committee (TAC) for official translators in NI and has opened a Cultural Affairs Desk in the NI Bureau in Washington*
- *the evidence of ‘resolute action’ includes the opening of an office in Belfast by Foras na Gaeilge; subgroups set up by the ICIG on particular issues – staff training, use of Irish in the courts (ongoing).*

The remainder of the DCAL report then goes in detail into the response to each of the thirty-six items under the eight Articles signed by the UK government in respect of Irish. In several instances, it relies on pre-Charter introduction information, on *Foras na Gaeilge* funded initiatives, and on the contribution of voluntary organisations, or reiterates material from the first report. Such, however, is the nature of such reports where each yearly report stands as a record of progress to date. It has been described as an exercise in ticking off the boxes. Highlighting of any new steps to be taken, and then subsequently taken, might be useful in future reports. Since most of this information is available elsewhere in the text, only new items put forward by the DCAL report under some Articles of the Charter are mentioned below.

Judicial Authorities (Article 9)

The Human Rights Act was under translation by DCAL. The practical implications of the report of the subgroup on the use of Irish in the court system was still being examined.

Administrative Authorities and Public Services (Article 10)

Some answers are couched in rather negative terms, particularly in view of the historic presence of Irish: ‘Government policy does not prohibit local or Regional authorities accepting oral or written applications in Irish’; ‘There is no statutory prohibition on a person’s use of the Irish version of their name’; the NI Museum’s Council’s Business Plan 2005/06 includes a target to provide guidelines ‘on the use of minority languages, including Irish’, to NI museums by end March 2006’.

Although Irish language awareness training has been given to public service staff and the Guidance paper issued, only two district councils have language policies. However, the ICIG is in contact with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (NI) are considering the possibility of issuing Irish language licences, but only on request.

Economic and Social Life (Article 13)

The wording given in reply to this section is in contrast to the more negative examples elsewhere, although overall not very explicatory of possible problems to Irish-speaking applicants. It is clear that applications will be in English. 'Throughout the UK, the use of Irish in the private/non-Governmental sector is facilitated on the same basis as any English-using private sector enterprise or non-Governmental organisation, and such are open to apply for public sector support'. The role of *Foras na Gaeilge* is cited. It has established an Advisory Panel in relation to the use of Irish in the sector.

For the Irish community in Belfast, it is the reference to the *Gaeltacht* Quarter that holds most interest, particularly since it appeared to be still in limbo in early 2006 despite this statement in mid 2005. 'The NI Administration is currently working on a partnership with the private, voluntary and community sectors to develop a *Gaeltacht* Quarter in West Belfast'.

THE ST. ANDREWS AGREEMENT 2006

The need for domestic legislation in addition to the Council of Europe Charter was recognised in the next historic step for Irish which came in late 2006. Significant commitments were made in the St. Andrews Agreement with respect to the Irish language. The first states that *the (British) Government will introduce an Irish Language Act reflecting on the experience of Wales and Ireland*; the second continues *and will work with the incoming Executive to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language*. The concept of a bill of rights, that might include language, was also raised once more. While reference was made to strategies to enhance the language, an Act for Irish did not form part of the legislation giving effect to the Agreement. Westminster implemented consultation towards an Act during the Direct Rule period. It was hoped that by May 2007, the position in relation to the proposed Act for the Irish language would be clearer. However, as shown below, argument was still ongoing in November 2007 and later.

NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION AND A BILL OF RIGHTS

On foot of commitment made in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement of 1998, the NI Human Rights Commission was set up a year later in March 1999. The Commission's brief included advice to the Secretary of State for NI on the content of a Bill of Rights (mentioned in both the Belfast and St. Andrews Agreements) in the particular circumstances of NI and referring to rights which are supplementary to the European Convention on Human Rights, the scope of which rights would be defined in Westminster legislation. The first Chief Commissioner considered the drafting of a Bill of Rights a priority when launching the Commission's 3-year plan in October 1999. Earlier, the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) had drawn up a draft Bill of Rights in 1985 and, in collaboration with Amnesty International, had co-convened the Human Rights Consortium.

In the St. Andrews Agreement the UK Government had committed to setting up a Bill of Rights Forum by end 2006 to inform the work of the Commission. The Forum has 28 members: 14 politicians (by party) and 14 representatives of differing sections of civic society, which also include the Churches, Trade Unions and Employers. In March 2007, an independent chairperson was appointed to the Forum (the former Australian Human Rights Commissioner), the Irish Government and officials having been informed in advance. The work of the Forum in reaching agreed recommendations towards a Bill of Rights for the Human Rights Commission is expected to be completed by March 2008. It was recently granted an additional €100,000 to enhance its outreach consultation programme.

The Commission has argued for *special rights in the context of NI* on a range of areas, including language. This was clear in the response of the present Chief Commissioner to the circumstances around the proposed Language Act in late 2007 as outlined below. [The concept of special rights has not received universal approval.](#)

[In the 4 January 2007 edition of the Church of Ireland Gazette, two articles from two \(personal\) opposing perspectives appeared on the issue of the forthcoming draft Bill of Rights for NI. The more](#)

negative article received more headlines and coverage and some political party support. The editorial offers the view that the concept should be dropped, that the principles of human rights 'are being confused with the broader category of legal rights'. The author writes that the special pleading for NI is politically motivated to bring NI closer to the Republic and that any such Bill should encompass the UK as a whole. The response of the Presbyterian representative of the Irish Council of Churches, given on the front page of the Gazette, considers that the political promise of the Good Friday Agreement should be kept, that such a step would constitute 'a cornerstone of the new Northern Ireland'. Other commentators pointed out that NI already has a judiciary and legal system apart and that a particular legal arrangement for a political entity within a state is nothing new. The Chair of the Forum pointed out that the need for a Bill of Rights for NI was accepted by the multi-faceted Forum at its first meeting. However, that the civil rights campaign of the late sixties was instigated largely by nationalists tends to make current moves towards a Bill of Rights for NI a difficult issue for unionists. It must be stressed that personal articles in any magazine do not constitute the collective view of the institution or Church, as in this case, which publish them.

The Draft Bill of Rights was eventually published on 31 March 2008, but without consensus, and formally handed over to the NI Human Rights Commission. The launch was not attended by the Catholic Church members of the Forum nor the Democratic Unionist Party members (on the issue of protection of the right to life from conception until death). The Commission, having considered the document, is to produce its own recommendations by 10 December 2008. These then go to Westminster as the NI Executive and Assembly are excepted from producing a Bill of Rights since the expectation of reaching agreement is not high. The eventual result should include, *inter alia*, references to language rights, to the right to minority language education. Nationality and identity may also be addressed. This bill may well overtake the Language Act, *Acht Teanga*.

One of the basic rights of the citizen in a democracy is the right to information particularly in relation to the election process. On 10 September 2007, the new incumbent at the NI Elections Office launched the voting registration form and accompanying guidelines in 10 languages, including Irish and simple English at an overall cost of £1,500 to £2,100. The Irish version is now available online at a cost to the Elections Office of no more than £150.

THE COURTS AND POLICE

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Representatives of the NI Courts are members of the Interdepartmental Charter Implementation Group (ICIG) chaired by DCAL. This group has issued advice and guidance to public bodies, including a template of behaviour to demonstrate language courtesy. DCAL provides general translation services and had ensured Irish language translations of statutory texts, including the Human Rights Act. Nevertheless, the subgroup on the use of Irish in the court system did not appear to be making much headway with regard to practical implications. The Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1737 has never been repealed. The case for seeking a judicial review of this Act, (which largely prevents any language other than English being used in the court system), and of other matters was being considered (November 2007) by the Irish language sector.

This was further highlighted in a case involving an Irish speaker who was taken to court by the police. The case continued for the latter half of 2006 and into late February 2007 as arguments were made to have the proceedings heard through Irish including having a judge competent to conduct the case through Irish. A judicial review on the general use of languages in the courts service was also being sought. The position of the Courts Service NI was that there was a legal obligation to conduct cases through English and clarification was required before hearing the evidence from both sides. This in itself seemed to indicate a certain lack of clarity despite the existing legal context of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and the obligations of the Charter. It underlined the need for an Act which might further elaborate specific rights. The Irish language community hoped to ensure clarification on the status of Irish in the courts and with the police. In the event, the case was adjourned several times; the legal team was requested to send a written application that all documents be translated to Irish; the issue was put before the Crown Court for clarification. The Public Prosecution Services had made arrangements for other languages and cases had been heard in Chinese and in Russian with interpretation. In the event, English prevailed and the general issue remains to be clarified.

However, in reply to one of two appeals against the 1737 Act, a High Court judge in April 2008 allowed the judicial review sought in relation to that Act which allows the use of English solely in NI courts. The Act is categorised as an ‘Act of the old Irish Parliament’ and is entitled Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1737. As laid down in the introduction, it is an Act ostensibly to protect people in Ireland in 1737 and in Northern Ireland now, who do not understand their legal counsel, particularly in writing, ‘lawyers and attorneys who use a character not legible to any but persons practising the law’. The original Act lays down that ‘All Proceedings whatsoever in any courts of justice ... shall be in the English tongue and language, and not in Latin or French, or any other tongue or language whatsoever’. The COMEX (Committee of Experts) report of March 2007 on the implementation of the Charter of the Council of Europe found such a practice to be at variance with the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. It had been repealed in the rest of the United Kingdom for over 100 years. The basis of the judicial review was that the British Government had a case to answer in showing how the 1737 Act was compatible with both the Human Rights Act 1998 and with Article 6 of the Charter.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has issued an Irish language version of its information sheet, entitled *Meas* (Respect) and a significant number of its members attend language classes organised by the Police College since 2001 when the *Ultach* Trust was invited to conduct classes. A number of the force (in which some from the Republic have enlisted) speak and understand Irish. However, some problems still remain: answering questions orally in Irish is not accepted of those under questioning by the PSNI and may be taken as refusal. As an example of commitment to equality and linguistic diversity, the force initiated 15 hours tuition for new recruits in Mandarin Chinese, Polish and Portuguese, in October 2006. Irish, however, was not included on the grounds that Irish speakers have English unlike speakers of the other languages.

With regard to Judicial Authorities, it was noted in comments to the report on the Charter of the Council of Europe that translation of statutory texts is ongoing and that three are currently available in Irish: the Education Order 1998 (NI); the North South Co-operation Order 1999 (NI, in part); the Northern Ireland Act 1998, Chapter 47.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND PUBLIC SERVICES

It was reported in the initial implementation of the Charter that some departments and local authorities had, or were drafting, a bilingual policy, more symbolic than active in some cases than others: the Department of Health; Limavady Council in Derry; Belfast City Council; Strabane District Council; Newry and Mourne District Council and others. The councils which already had a *Coiste* or an *Oifigeach Gaeilge* (Committee or Officer) for the promotion of Irish were to the fore. Bilingual public signage (now given qualified permission), whether on streets or shop fronts, was becoming increasingly more visible in nationalist areas. Actual provision of bilingual services to the public was, however, as reported by *Pobal*, more complex than community language promotion. The Royal Mail had been castigated for using the linguistic skills of existing staff to ensure the delivery of post addressed in Irish instead of seconding or training staff to meet the new conditions. This problem appears to have been solved in recent times through funding from *Foras na Gaeilge* to the Placenames Project at Queen’s University Belfast. However, the students of Queen’s University, Belfast, voted in a bilingual policy and later voted it out again. With some exceptions, local authorities responded to the obligations of the Charter of the Council of Europe at a relatively slow pace. The Department of the Environment prepared Guidelines for issue to local authorities. For example, while oral or written applications through Irish are not actually prohibited, implementation may be delayed.

On the other hand, the Department responsible for social services recently did rescind its decision to refuse permission to an employee to follow a diploma course through the medium of Irish, due to the intervention of the organisation *Pobal* and elected representatives.

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS: REDUCTION AND RE-ORGANISATION

There are currently 26 local authority structures, district councils, in NI with restricted powers. All, however, have responsibilities in relation to Irish arising out of Article 10, Part III of the Charter of the Council of Europe. Some had begun initiating Irish language activity before the Charter was signed by the UK. In November 2005, the Secretary of State announced plans, signalled two years previously, in a continuing review of public administration since 2002, to reduce the number of all public sector

institutions in NI, which he described as ‘over-governed and over-administered’ for an area of 5,400 square miles with a population of 1.7 million. The results were expected to be as follows.

Institution	Now	Proposed (2005)
District Councils	26	7
Education and Library Boards	05	1 Authority*
Health Authorities	04	1
Health Trusts	18	5
Total	53	14

In fact, since there are official quangos and bodies associated with some of these institutions, the real total is as follows.

Institutions	Now	Proposed (2005)
Total	67	20

* *Or perhaps 2* to deal with different aspects of education and with relevant agencies as *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta* coming under one of the new bodies. In fact, the 2008–2001 Budget of the restored Assembly signalled 1 NI Library Authority by 2009 (DCAL) as well as a new Education and Skills Authority (DE).

This new reduction policy may have repercussions, positive and negative, for language policy, depending on the demographic spread of Irish speakers in the new areas. While the Boundary Commission would complete the delineation of the proposed seven district councils, it quickly became apparent that there would probably be, at the least, three unionist dominated and three nationalist dominated areas, with one mixed area. The requirements of the Charter will, of course, remain. It may, then, with a reduced number of institutions to deal with, make it easier to devise, implement, and monitor policy as well as to seek redress if necessary. In addition, the proposed district councils will receive enhanced powers some of which will impact on policy for language in the council area. The number of councillors involved will change also, from 582 to 420 overall, or 60 each per new division. No dual mandate will be allowed under the new arrangements.

In early November 2006, the new boundaries and suggested names of the seven new proposed local authorities were made public for comment by early January 2007 followed by public meetings, consultation until May, for decision by July and in operation by 2009. The early comments proved interesting. In general, reduction from 26 to 13 would have been more acceptable on the grounds that a mere 7 councils might prove out of touch with the grassroots, where political opponents had learned to co-operate in the interests of the local, then smaller, community. This would be particularly significant if power sharing did not occur at Assembly level. The Council for the north east proved unacceptable to many as it did not extend to all the ancient *Dál Riada* territory, after which a significant number of local institutions were named.

Final resolution awaited the deliberations of the restored Assembly. By late 2007, decision had not yet been taken by the new Assembly but the thinking was towards 10 or 14 district councils instead of the original proposal of 7; [by early 2008, this had crystallised at 11 district councils, the number of councillors and the functions of authorities to be clarified further. Since these 11 super-councils were not to be in place until 2011, elections were postponed and may now take place under the new structure. It was also announced later that the present number of 562 councillors could be reduced to 460. The Boundary Commission will ensure safeguards for minorities in the decisions to be made in relation to the size and shape of the new administrative areas. It was clear, also, that the changes would cause loss of jobs in the sector, up to 3,500.](#) In education, the proposed Education and Skills Authority has been deferred until 2009. The restructuring of the Health and Social Services sector and its gradual implementation has reduced 18 Hospital Trusts to 5; 4 Health and Social Services Councils to one Patient and Client Council; 4 Boards to a single Authority.

FORAS NA GAELIGE SCHEME

In early 2007, *An Foras* advertised for initial applications of interest in a scheme of Irish Officers in local authorities in NI similar to the scheme previously established in the Republic. The officers would be jointly funded for a period of three years with the aim of furthering the use of Irish in the public sector. After that period, the hope would be that a system would have been established to be funded in future by the authorities themselves.

POLICIES FOR IRISH

Newry and Mourne is the only NI local authority with a developed and active language policy for several years. It employs three people in its *Aonad* (Unit) which has responsibility also for Ulster-Scots. It also has a full translation system in operation and often advertises bilingually. It provides guidance to other interested local authorities. The section works largely through the community. The three district councils of Fermanagh, Strabane and Omagh are in process of drafting a policy for Irish while Cookstown has established a language subcommittee to begin such drafting and Magherafelt is processing towards such a structure. Derry City Council has developed practices and procedures but has not yet an active policy. The city and district council of Armagh recently adopted a linguistic diversity policy from which Irish benefits. Language awareness courses for staff are being conducted. Local groups were invited to help run these. Correspondence and oral enquiries may now be received in Irish. Apart from its historic ecclesiastical links, Armagh has Irish-medium schooling at pre-school, primary and postprimary levels. The organisation, *Gael-Linn*, has long had its office there and this was officially re-opened recently with the attendance of representatives of both traditions.

Some local authorities support cultural and linguistic events. In recent times, five local authorities partially subvent *Ródseó na Gaeilge* (Irish Roadshow), a show of music, song, and poetry which tours across NI. These authorities are Belfast, Newry and Mourne, Down, Omagh, Strabane.

While none of the restructured health services has an active policy for Irish, some services had published materials in Irish and one had plans for bilingual signage in one of the units it operates.

PUBLIC SIGNAGE

Bilingual street signs require a sufficient proportion of residents to support the change. Before repeal of the 1949 legislation on street names, several communities had erected their own signs in Irish. The problem now appears to be political at local authority level as several examples testify. In September 2004, Newry District Council allowed a resolution permitting the use of names in Irish for housing developments although there was some initial argument from the Council's housing officials on the basis that Irish-only naming would be unlawful which led to a proposal from the Housing Committee that the development would be named 'Cush Locha'. In the event, the Irish version, '*Cois Locha*', was adopted for the apartment block. Signage, however, as such a public symbol, remains a contentious issue with local authorities. In the Moyle district of North Antrim, the council supported the local request for bilingual signage, conducted the requisite consultation and found agreement. However, it was then decided that the financial resources were not available to carry it out. In Lisburn, County Antrim, bilingual signage for developments in the course of construction was supported both by the developer and the Housing Executive but voted down three times by unionist councillors. Since the developments were not yet inhabited, nationalists suggested a delay but the motion was put and passed that the signage be English only. In areas of East Tyrone and South Derry, where the community requested bilingual signage, the Department of Regional Development and the Roads Service at first delayed to seek legal advice then informed the requesters that they could not give permission. The direct rule minister did not take action either way. There is no common policy across the local authorities. All decisions are ultimately politically based and biased. An Act could help to depersonalise the process, perhaps, and allow the practice of linguistic equality.

The new Regional Development Minister has developed policy on signs in languages other than English with a view to amending the Road Traffic Regulation (NI) Order 1997. Since the legislation was in English, it was assumed that this could be interpreted to mean that English-only signs were permitted. In October 2007, the minister announced that the new draft policy which he intended to bring before the Assembly allowed for bilingual signs (allowing Irish or Ulster-Scots) and that finance was available. Unionist debate centred on the possible dangers. However, research from Wales refuted this. A study conducted for the Welsh Office in 1980 by the Science Institute of Wales found no

increase in traffic accidents in the period after the introduction of bilingual signs there in 1969. Neither could the local authorities find evidence that such signs were in themselves the cause of accidents. In 2000, research from the University of Leeds found that reading bilingual signs does not take more time.

PLACENAMES

The edition of *Ainmneacha Gaeilge na mBailte Poist* (Irish names of postal towns) published by the Ordnance Survey Office in Dublin in 1969 is divided into the four historic provinces of Ireland and includes the nine counties of the older Province of Ulster, of which six constitute the polity of NI. The division of Ireland into counties occurred after the Proclamation of King James I of 1603 when English law took the place of the older native Brehon Law which was rejected by the English-administered courts in Ireland. Nowadays, Ordnance Survey NI include placenames in Irish in their publications and the Irish versions of street names are promised for the Common Address File.

The Ulster Placenames Society was established in 1987 to research and publish all the placenames of NI. Eight volumes have been published to date by Queen's University, Belfast (QUB). Much of this work is available on the terminological website, POINTER. In July, 2005, *Foras na Gaeilge* announced funding to the Placenames Project to produce Irish language versions of all postal addresses in NI. The Irish language community welcomed this initiative both for the conservation of the traditional historic placenames but also to enable more people to use the Irish version of their addresses and to provide assistance to the Royal Mail which supported the application for funding. Street names are then part of the project and of assistance also to citizens in attempts to persuade their local authorities to use bilingual forms of names. This is possible since the repeal in the mid 1990s of the 1949 legislation on street names. This refers, however, only to the erection of street names in 'English and any other language' and residents' views prevail in the case of street signs. The *Ultach* Trust has also provided funding as the work progresses. The results of the project are available on an internet site for public use, www.ulsterplacenames.org.

The case of the city of *Doire Cholmcille*, or the site of St. Columba's Oak Grove, continues to be interesting. Each of the two communities or traditions, nationalist and unionist, consider their version to be an expression of their historical identity, Derry or Londonderry. [In the 2008–2011 Budget for NI, the Department of Employment and Learning \(DEL\) refers inclusively to colleges in Londonderry/Derry.](#) Some institutions chose L'derry on their stationery. The official invitation to the opening of the *Oireachtas* 2006 festival had three headings indicative of parity of esteem: *The Mayor's Parlour; Parlús an Mhéara; The Provost's Chaumer (Ulster-Scots)*. Some years ago, the city council, where nationalist councillors dominate, changed its own nomenclature to Derry. Recently, it applied to the high court seeking a judicial review to make a similar change to the name of the city itself. This was rejected on the grounds that such a move would change the name of the city as specified in the charter granted by King Charles the Second in 1662. The alternatives are either to petition the queen or change the existing law. As this is a local authority matter, nationalist councillors are calling on the Department of the Environment to begin the process. The legal advice is that the matter rightly should stay with the city council itself. However, even if such a symbolic change were made, it is unlikely that it will change the way in which either tradition wishes to express itself.

FUNDING AND EXPENDITURE ON THE IRISH LANGUAGE

In the same manner as in the Republic, all government departments will have some expenditure in relation to Irish, particularly Education and are expected to provide for this out of their annual budget. The department with specific responsibility for the language is the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL).

The figures given in Table 8.1 (a) have been provided by the Linguistic Operations Branch within DCAL. Expenditure is given by Government Department.

Irish language projects, if put forward, may also benefit from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and several other programmes of assistance. The newspaper, *Lá*, is one example. [In December 2006, €60 million was allocated to the IFI by the European Parliament for the period 2007–2010. At the same time, on foot of advice from the Legal Affairs Committee of the Parliament, the legal basis of the IFI report and funding allocation were changed from Article 308 of the European Community Treaty, which allows for consultation by the Council of Ministers with the Parliament, to Article](#)

159, which provides for co-decision powers for the Parliament. The IFI focuses on economic regeneration in NI and in the Border Counties in order to strengthen the peace process. A recent beneficiary of both the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation and the EU Interreg Programme is the Shaylyn Traditional Arts Centre in County Leitrim for cross-border initiatives, particularly in traditional dance, Irish and Ulster-Scots. The centre is also accredited by the Irish World Music Centre in the University of Limerick to deliver a third level Irish dance and music course.

However interpreted, this figure of just over €18 million in 2004–2005, Table 8.1 (a), compares well with expenditure of just over £3.5 million (€5.215) in 1997, showing the political changes wrought, particularly through the new structures established. The DCAL figures cover the following bodies and projects.

- **Colmille:** Agency to develop links between Irish and Scottish Gaelic, funded by government in Dublin, Belfast and Edinburgh with a development officer in each jurisdiction.
- **Arts annual support for organisation programmes:** *Bláthanna* Arts (*Gaeláras*, Derry); *Cultúrlann* (Belfast); *Aisling Ghéar* (theatre company, Belfast); *An tUltach* (magazine); *Lá* (newspaper); writer-in-residence (University of Ulster).
- **Lottery supported arts projects:** *Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain* (Belfast); *Comhchoiste na Gaeilge* (North Antrim); *An Droichead* (Belfast); *Ababú* (theatre company); *Pobal* (community forum); *Compántas Amharclainne* (theatre company); *Scannán* (film) *Aisling Ghéar*.

The individual departmental totals do not appear to include internal expenditure on translation or advertising. The DCAL annual grant to *Foras na Gaeilge* does not appear either.

Six departments gave NIL returns for that year, 2004–2005, when direct rule from Westminster was still in force: Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and OFMDFM (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister), Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), Environment (DOE), Regional Development (DRD).

The next set of expenditure figures, Table 8.1 (b), appeared, interestingly enough, in the Consultation Paper on the proposed Act for the Irish language issued by DCAL in December 2006. They may have been included in response to unionist claims after the St. Andrews Agreement that an Act for Irish would be costly. Interpretation and translation expenditure is specifically included.

These figures did not include the costs of transport to Irish-medium schools, estimated at £488,000 (€727,120) for the school year 2004–2005. DCAL also pointed out in a footnote that two further grants-in-aid were not included in its own figures as given: *Foras na Gaeilge* £2,945,212 (€4,388,366) and *An Ciste Craoltóireachta Gaeilge* (Broadcasting Fund) £2,999,874 (€4,469,812). In fact, it later transpired that the Broadcasting Fund, which comes from Westminster, had been included.

The figures drew reaction from both unionist and nationalist quarters. Unionists demanded an audit of the total of all monies, £24 million (DCAL plus *Foras* plus Broadcasting), expended on Irish (€21 million *de facto* since Broadcasting Fund had been included). In their view it would be better spent on health and education. An interesting comment was made in an article in the leading unionist newspaper, the News Letter, to the effect that a cultural armoury was now replacing the other kind of arms.

Nationalist comment pointed out the small sums expended by some departments and the resulting lack of services for Irish speakers. In particular, clarification was sought on translation and advertising in Irish from all departments. Official figures provided showed an overall total decrease in this area over the years:

NI expenditure on translation and advertising in Irish

2002–2003	2003–2004	2004–2005
£312,215 (€465,200)	£145,051 (€216,126)	£103,052 (€153,548)

In addition, a further analysis, based on Table 8.1 (b), of the expenditure of DCAL, the department responsible for Irish language matters, was carried out by the newspaper *Lá*. On this reckoning, DCAL would have spent no more than £200,000 from its own resources in 2006, this on the agency *Colmille* and departmental translation work. The basis of this complicated reductionist calculation was as follows:

DCAL Expenditure on Irish: Calculation by *Lá* (newspaper)

DCAL total erroneously given 3,826,652 minus 2,999,874 Broadcasting Fund from Westminster = 826,778
826,778 minus 374,000 on Irish arts projects (funded by the UK Lottery) = 452,778
452,778 minus 238,000 (for Irish arts programmes through the Arts Council) = 214,778
214,778 = <i>Colmille</i> + translation work

Some recent figures on government expenditure in NI were given to the Assembly by the minister with responsibility for the language in his address to members on the proposed Language Act on 16 October 2007 as part of his argument on the estimated future costs of such legislation.

NI Expenditure on the Irish Language 2006–2007 by Source

All departments + NI Office	
Linguistic diversity projects (presumably Irish only)	£3,484,000
Translation	£117,000
DCAL	
Irish Broadcasting Fund (Westminster)	£3,000,000 (in excess of)
<i>Foras na Gaeilge</i>	£3,556,000
Dept. of Education	
Irish-medium education	£10,303,000
Dept. of Employment & Learning	
	£100,000
Total Estimate	£20,560,000

The first draft budget (2008-2011) from the DUP Finance Minister of the Executive to the Assembly was regarded as most disappointing by Irish language activists and as not having any visible investment in Irish language affairs. The Broadcasting Fund was not mentioned after 2009 giving the impression that the NI Government would not take up where Westminster left off. *Foras na Gaeilge* was not mentioned but the *Boord O' Ulster Scotch* was. The following sums were allocated, in almost decreasing annual increases, to the joint body, *An Foras Teanga*: 2007 £6.24; 2008 £6.9; 2009 £7.1; 2010 £7.4; 2011 £7.9. This could have implications for the allocation from the relevant government department in the Republic, and hence for the funding of organisations and activities. In the event, the budget on 22 January 2008 allocated the following sums to *An Foras Teanga*: 2007/8 (£6.1m); 2008/9 (£6.9m, +12%); 2009/10 (£7.1m, +3.6%); 2010/11 (£7.4m, +3.4%).

Under the statement on *Equality and Good Relations* (required of all departments), DCAL refers to its *Culture and Linguistic Diversity Programme* as a means to enhance and protect the development of the Irish Language and the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture. However, in the introduction to the DCAL budget, increased funding for the Ulster-Scots Agency is clearly stated as is its provenance, the St. Andrews Agreement.

With regard to either a proposed strategy for Irish (St. Andrews Agreement) or in relation to Irish under the Charter, it had been made clear that such expenditure was a matter for individual ministers out of their existing allocations.

TOWARDS LANGUAGE LEGISLATION**BACKGROUND**

Public meetings were held in Belfast by *Conradh na Gaeilge* when the early drafts of the initial Bill of Rights prepared by *Conradh* were first being publicised. A specific version was prepared for speakers of Irish in the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland at that time. In September 2003 a public meeting was organised by the community organisation *Pobal* (Community) to discuss developments in the Republic with a view to the evolution of more comprehensive language legislation in Northern Ireland. Currently the Irish language in NI comes under the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe. *Pobal* issued status reports (2002 and 2005) on the operation of the Charter to the monitoring Committee of Experts (COMEX) and prepared Guidelines for speakers on their entitlements under the Charter, some of which were being queried, particularly by local authorities. There was a view that, as local authorities, they did not come within the scope of the Charter. This view was legally challenged. That such a challenge had to be mounted does indicate the need for legal support and clarification for actions to promote Irish in NI.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission convened a Working Group on Language Rights in 2000 which reported in 2001. Their advice was considered in the subsequent consultation paper issued towards the content of a comprehensive Bill of Rights, in which a chapter was devoted to language and rights in the context of Northern Ireland. Over 70 submissions were received which had references to linguistic rights in the consultation process then initiated. Several, from political and public service groups, were more than dismissive of rights for Irish speakers, a stance borne out at a Conference on the subject held at Queen's University at the end of 2001. The issues for the Commission included the distinction between indigenous and other languages; what is, or should be, the relationship with the Charter of the Council of Europe, which is capable of the implementation of even stronger items than those initially chosen by the UK; the influence of other examples of linguistic legislation in the UK (Welsh and that then being sought for *Gáidhlig* in Scotland); the legal arguments in relation to human rights and linguistic rights; the declarations made in the Good Friday Agreement. The eventual draft bill published proposed that Irish and English be put on the same legal footing in NI. The Commission, set up in the wake of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, is the only statutory human rights body in the UK. It was restructured and new members appointed (May 2004), a move which had repercussions for the draft bill and the proposal in relation to languages. The process continues, as reported above.

The Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement lays a responsibility on every public body to carry out an audit of all its policies and practices to ensure that no group within the population receives unfair treatment. While language is not cited in the list within the equality legislation in either NI or the Republic, the Irish language community in NI is lobbying the Equality Commission for inclusion.

Unfortunately, there seemed to exist little co-ordination between the various agencies with possible responsibility for language in NI. Nor was there an agreed foundation from which to advance with regard to the defining characteristics of the list of languages which most official agencies are now attempting to deal with together, including Cant and Gammon of the indigenous Traveller community and both British and Irish Sign languages. While *communication* is important as a definitional characteristic, it is not sufficient, since it may apply also to bees and to computers. In the case of the Charter, some degree of clarity, which is still lacking, was sought from the outset. Neither is co-operation and communication evident among the various agencies. The Human Rights Commission was not informed by DCAL of the first visit of the Committee of Experts from the Council of Europe, nor did the Government supply a copy of the Commission's report to the Council of Europe. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that negativity has not gone away in relation to language in NI. One commentator has described Irish in NI as having, for some, the characteristics of the pebble in the shoe.

There are six cross-border bodies dealing with various aspects of cross-border affairs, *An Foras Teanga* (Language Body) for Irish and Ulster-Scots among them. The chair of the Ulster-Scots section of *An Foras Teanga*, Tha Boord o'Ulster-Scotch, who had just resigned, announced in April 2004 that he would mount a legal challenge to the validity of the new language legislation in the Republic, the Official Languages Act (2003), since, in his opinion, it had effect on bodies that functioned outside the jurisdiction of the Republic and was in conflict with the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. The Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin pointed out that the cross-border bodies are responsible to the law of the Republic and to the law of NI and the UK and that a constitutional imperative regarding Irish that predates the Agreement exists in the Republic. In addition, the British Government had been informed before the enactment of the Official Languages Act. A code of practice has been developed by officials in both jurisdictions for these cross-border bodies.

The results of the monitoring of the implementation of the Charter of the Council of Europe as well as language legislation in the ROI and the UK gave fresh impetus to the push for language legislation in NI.

THE IRISH LANGUAGE ACT NI – ACHT NA GAEILGE DO THUAISCEART ÉIREANN

This is the unambiguous title of an exemplar of a draft Language Act prepared over two years, 2004-2006, by the voluntary organisation *Pobal*.

In November 2004, this umbrella group organised in Belfast a high level international conference on language legislation to which experts in the field were invited from as near as Scotland and as far

away as Australia. By April 2005, following acceptance by the Scottish Parliament of a Bill for *Gàidhlig* in Scotland, *Pobal* made a strong case for legislation for Irish in NI on the following grounds:

- legislative protection now existed not only for Irish in the ROI, *Official Languages Act 2003*, but also in the UK for the other two indigenous Celtic languages, *Welsh Language Act 1993*; *Gáidhlig Act 2005*; in addition, Irish had now official working status in the EU which would be operative from 1 January 2007
- Irish in NI was now dependent on the *Charter of the Council of Europe* (an international instrument not incorporated into domestic law), and interpretation of equality legislation and legislation on rights
- the lack of understanding with regard to the status of Irish in NI required clarification with regard to both the rights of citizens and the duties of public bodies.

(This situation was compounded by the *de facto* position that no statutory definition of an official language exists in NI).

Draft legislation was then prepared by *Pobal* with the assistance of external experts and refined through a wide ranging consultative process of public meetings held around NI, in collaboration with *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta* (official promotion body for Irish-medium education), since proposals on education formed an important part of the draft. Meetings were held in Belfast (two, one devoted primarily to education), Derry, Strabane, Omagh, Iniskillen. All proposals for consideration had to be received by August 2005 to allow the business of drafting to proceed towards conclusion.

Several events happened towards the end of 2005 which gave added impetus to the drafting. In November the Monitoring Committee of Experts (COMEX) on the implementation of the Charter met with *Pobal*, as NGO, and the two Commissions, Equality and Human Rights. Based on the type of complaints being brought to *Pobal* on problems with local authorities with regard to implementation of the Charter, the necessity for the Monitoring Committee to take a lead in requesting more binding legislation was underlined. These complaints related to basic issues: the right to use personal names in Irish or placenames in one's address; replies to letters in Irish either in English or clearly reminding the writer that letters in English would be dealt with more promptly; refusal by the Road Services Section and the Department of Regional Development to allow local signs to be bilingual, against the wishes of community groups; the general negatively reactive position being taken by unionist controlled councils.

A further instance was reported in December 2005. Firstly, the Chief Electoral Officer made clear, in a letter in English, that his office did not have 'the resources to publish materials in languages other than English' except for certain categories of persons; that 'where a person can understand and communicate well in English ... it is not unreasonable, in the interests of the whole community, for them to use this ability when dealing with electoral matters'. In addition, since '[he] did not have any understanding of the Irish language, it would be very helpful to [him] personally if [the person seeking materials in Irish] would communicate... in English at all times'. No other person could deal with the matter in Irish, since only the Chief Electoral Officer himself spoke for the office. These were the kinds of issues for which *Pobal* hoped a better solution could be reached for all concerned through proper legislation.

Calls continued to be made for basic forms to be provided by the authorities in bilingual format on areas of life that impinged on the contact between citizen and State: television licence, car tax, income tax, registration of births/marriages/deaths. A suggestion was made that copies of these, however unauthorised, should be provided by Irish speakers themselves and let the State deal with the outcome. The problems of initiating and operating a bilingual policy, with regard to both attitudes and language competence, are highlighted.

By February 2006, the final draft of an Act was printed and presented on 3 February to the Minister for Community, Rural and *Gaeltacht* Affairs of the ROI who complimented *Pobal* on the professionalism of the publication. It was launched in NI on 8 February at the Courts NI Information Centre, in the aptly named Windsor House, by Senator Maurice Hayes, a member of *Seanad Éireann* (nominee of the *Taoiseach*) and former head of the civil service in NI. He considered the recommendations of the draft Act both practical and reasonable, containing due regard to the possible problems for others and mechanisms for dealing with such problems.

CONTENT OF THE DRAFT ACT OF POBAL

The draft Act contains two scholarly and wide ranging expositions: one from Colin H. Williams (University of Cardiff, Wales) on indigenous language rights and legislation; the other by Fernand de Varennes (Murdoch University, Australia) giving a summary of the existing international legal obligations of the UK in respect of Irish in NI. The possible content of a future Act is given under the following headings: Political Institutions; Local Authorities; Administration of Justice; Public Services; Employment; Education; Media; Enforcement of Rights and Obligations under the Act. The headings are first treated to an individual commentary. Then the proposals are made under each heading. This is followed by the Schedule of Public Bodies to which the proposals pertain.

Coming at the time that it did, Irish and *Gàidhlig* having been given legislative underpinning, and with the advice of law experts from the universities of Aberdeen and Glasgow, the draft Act drew from the strengths and weaknesses of both existing Acts. As in the Republic, the NI draft Act requires a *Coimisinéir* to ensure implementation. However, in the section on Public Services, a board with a double mandate is also proposed: to uphold the rights of Irish speakers and to plan strategically for the language, *An Bord um Chearta agus Phleanáil na Gaeilge Thuaisceart Éireann*. The *Gàidhlig* Act had given a statutory basis to the existing *Bord na Gàidhlig*. Probably the biggest difference with the Official Languages Act in the Republic is the emphasis in the draft Act for NI on rights based legislation and on legally enforceable implementation instead of the schemes to be drawn up by public bodies in the ROI.

Although set out in legalese, the draft Act for discussion is clear, accessible and well organised. It adheres well to the principles of language law invoked in the de Varennes article: clarity in legislation; proportionality in application; efficacy in institutions; remedies to ensure compliance. Williams points out two arguments for legislative protection for indigenous languages that have relevance for society as a whole: their linguistic survival since if a language, indigenous to a territory, disappears, that is a loss to the ecosystem; redress of historic injustice that prevented the development of the language community.

STATUS OF THE DRAFT ACT OF POBAL

The document prepared by *Pobal* was a draft for discussion by the UK Government. While the NI Assembly was suspended at the time of publication, it was hoped that such legislation would not be left to that body, but that the Westminster Parliament would deal with it, as is the case with Broadcasting. Given the polarised situation in NI, the view was that legislation of this kind for NI would probably stand a better chance, if ever accepted for discussion, in Westminster.

Political support came from *Foras na Gaeilge* and from the nationalist parties. In January 2006, *Sinn Féin* had already announced that 2006 was to be *Bliain na Gaeilge* (Year of the Irish Language) and that the Irish language would form one of their main priorities in talks with the British Government. It was suggested by the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) that the two parties should work together at Westminster and invoke the assistance of Welsh and Scottish members and others who might support the idea for differing political reasons. A level of support was found and the following wording prepared for tabling in the House of Commons by Eddie McGrady, MP, of the SDLP, in the form of an Early Day Motion, in April 2006.

Protection of The National Language

That this House notes that the use of the Scottish Gaelic language in Scotland and the Welsh language in Wales is protected and promoted by legislation, but this is not the case regarding the Irish language in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Government to introduce legislation to promote and protect the Irish language in Northern Ireland.

Twenty signatures were soon available: SDLP 3; Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) 1; Plaid Cymru (Wales) 1; Liberal Democrat Party 2; Conservative Party 1; Labour Party 12.

Early Day Motions are a mechanism for drawing attention to particular issues, gauging support among MPs for issues and hopefully ensuring a debate although time pressures rarely allow the latter.

A group from *Pobal* and *Stádas* also made the case for legislation at meetings in Brussels and received the support of members of the EU Parliament from Catalonia and Hungary. Closer to home, a member from Wales intended to raise the issue with the Secretary of State for NI.

As is often the case in NI, other political matters began to dominate the agenda. However, as Senator Hayes wrote in his Introduction to the Act, there can be no doubt that 'it is now time to

move the discussion to another plane, and the document usefully provides an outline of a Language Act as a basis for discussion'. An April 2006 governmental meeting in Armagh set the goal of restoring the local political institutions, followed by the conditional restoration of the NI Assembly on 15 May 2006, its first meeting since it had once more been suspended on 14 October 2002. The parties were then given until November 2006 to decide whether devolved government or direct rule from Westminster was to be the future for NI. If no agreement were reached on power sharing, suspension of the Assembly would follow and no further salaries or allowances would be paid to members elected to that Assembly. The Northern Secretary was given further powers, among them the discretion to delay or stay the next Assembly elections. The All-Party talks scheduled for October 2006 were then of immense significance. After three days of talks at St. Andrews in Scotland, the St. Andrews Agreement was signed on 13 October. It contained, *inter alia*, a road map of dates for endorsement of this Agreement of the two Governments and a statement on Irish with two parts. The first part states that 'the (British) Government will introduce an Irish Language Act reflecting on the experience of Wales and Ireland'; the second part continues 'and work with the incoming Executive to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language'.

The same month, in advance of those talks, the Irish language community in NI laid out four demands: *Acht na Gaeilge* (Irish language Act); a fair share of funding for Irish; fairness for Irish in broadcasting; continual developmental support for Irish-medium education. On 7 November, the *Taoiseach* referred to the campaign for an Act in NI in his speech to his party's *Ard-Fheis*. The draft legislation to give effect to the Agreement was now available. However, despite the advocacy campaign mounted by *Pobal*, which included advertisements signed by prominent people, signatures of support for the Act and meetings with politicians, there was no mention of the Language Act in the bill for implementation published on 16 November. The explanation was given that it is not usual to refer in a bill to legislation, or an Act, not yet enacted. The legislation arising from the St. Andrews Agreement did refer, in section 15, to the responsibility of the power sharing Executive to draft and accept policy to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language. In addition, the Executive was required to improve and develop the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture, as mentioned already in the Agreement. This was taken to be the first reference in legislation to Ulster-Scots as a language.

However, the Government commitment to language legislation, to an Act for Irish, remained although no indication had been given of what it might contain. The importance of this legislation being passed at Westminster rather than at Stormont was twofold: the possibility of delay, change and dilution in a unionist dominated future Assembly; that bodies such as the courts and the BBC would have to be included if enacted, as promised, at Westminster. Since the timeline fixed for power sharing institutions would end by 26 March 2007, time constraints made the issue even more urgent. *Pobal* then kept up political pressure. By 21 November, the responsible department in NI hoped to have a draft document ready by December for the statutory 12 week consultation period after which the material would go back to Westminster for the preparation of draft legislation.

OFFICIAL CONSULTATION PAPER ON PROPOSED LANGUAGE LEGISLATION

Two months to the day after the signing of the St. Andrews Agreement 2006, on 13 December 2006, the Westminster Minister at the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) in NI issued a Consultation Paper on the proposed Irish language legislation for NI. The consultation process would end on 2 March 2007. Elections to the NI Assembly would take place on 8 March. The proposed legislation, if going through Westminster, would have to do so before 26 March, the date set for devolution or dissolution. Lengthy parliamentary debate could be avoided if the procedure 'Order in Council' already used in some instances of legislation for NI were activated. The lengthy Consultation Paper basically offered four possibilities for the Act: a rights-based approach; duties prescribed for public bodies; language schemes; a combined approach. Legal advice to *Pobal* pointed out some flaws: the Consultation Paper was not in the spirit of the Belfast (Good Friday) agreement 1998 which referred not only to public bodies but to private life also; no reference to the domain of broadcasting. The latter had significance since broadcasting legislation is reserved to Westminster and the recent Broadcasting Act contained no reference to Irish nor did the BBC Charter although the BBC intended to carry out their own consultation process in early 2007. A comprehensive, rights-based approach, based on justice was the slogan from *Pobal*.

The media response to this first Consultation Paper was fairly predictable. Unionist papers had

problems with it, nationalist papers welcomed it, neutral papers reported it. Nevertheless, the leader in the unionist *News Letter* (published since 1737) did agree in its editorial that Irish was a living language deserving of official support. The political reaction was similar. Unionist spokespersons were either negative or expressed the hope to have the legislation referred to the Assembly where it might be either scuppered or weakened. An Alliance party spokesperson had misgivings on the grounds that an Act would transfer power back to bureaucrats from language activists on the ground; that rights would mean common rights; that legislation is never flexible enough for a changing society. Internationally, organisations interested in language legislation and Celtic languages organisations outside Ireland had welcomed the St. Andrews Agreement, particularly since a possible bill of rights, which could include language rights, had also been mentioned.

In efforts to influence both the content of the consultation document and the ensuing feedback, *Pobal* was very active. Meetings were organised with language organisations, human rights organisations and unions. Local authorities were briefed on the content of the draft Act prepared by *Pobal*. In London, there were meetings with all political parties. A group *Acht* Act was formed to concentrate efforts on four demands: honouring the St. Andrews Agreement; that rights be at the heart of the Act; that resources be provided to implement it; that a Commissioner be appointed to oversee implementation. On 30 November a conference on legislation was held by *Pobal* attended by the Language Commissioner from Canada, the Minister from Dublin who had steered the Official Languages Act through the Houses of the *Oireachtas*, a member of the Welsh Language Board and politicians from the NI nationalist parties. A march was held in Belfast. Irish speakers were urged to make their views known through the consultation process.

At the end of the consultation process, DCAL reported 668 written submissions, 93% of which favoured an Act. In addition, 2,500 signatures were collected online, 1,376 post cards in favour were delivered and 800 people had signatures in favour on the public advertisement placed by *Pobal*.

Behind the scenes of the larger political drama during the same period, there was also much activity. There were fears that the Act for Irish would be ditched in order to keep the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) especially on the side of the political process towards re-institution of power sharing. The view generally was that an Act for the Irish language would come but in a very weakened form.

DRAFT CLAUSES TOWARDS LEGISLATION

In the event, in the aftermath of Assembly elections on 8 March and during negotiations towards the establishment of a power-sharing executive by 26 March, a statement was made in Westminster by the relevant NI direct rule minister on 13 March 2007 regarding publication the same day of a document allowing further consultation on Irish language legislation but now based on draft indicative clauses for such legislation. This set of indicative clauses towards legislation was not rights based but based on language schemes being available from a range of public bodies, 17 overall. However, the post of Commissioner was included to oversee implementation of these schemes. In addition, certain statutory forms would be provided and the use of Irish in the courts was allowed on prior notice. Broadcasting and public signage were not included. Official explanations were that the draft legislation was a beginning, given the difficult circumstances of finding a level of consensus, and could be developed in future as had happened in the case of Welsh. More disappointing to the Irish language lobby, however, was the provision of another twelve weeks of public consultation on every clause of the second version of draft legislation published, so that this process would not now conclude until 5 June 2007. In the meantime, emergency legislation allowed the date to be moved from 26 March to 8 May 2007 for power sharing and devolution to begin.

In this interim period until 5 June, *Pobal* continued to press for resolution at Westminster and for as many as possible to submit replies as part of this second consultation process. The organisation issued a 15 point reply based on analysis of the new draft indicative clauses towards legislation. In the devolved power sharing Executive, the new Minister at DCAL is a member of the DUP. However, he made it clear that the results of the consultation process would go before the Executive and the Assembly for decision based on the input received. Nevertheless, commentators believe that the political games of give and take have now involved the Irish language to a significant degree. While it was clear that the Act for Irish would almost certainly come before Stormont rather than Westminster, neither timing nor eventual content were clarified until late 2007.

THE RESTORED ASSEMBLY AND THE ACT FOR IRISH

In the mean time, however, unionist (Democratic and Ulster Unionist Parties) views on the possible legislation for Irish as well as on the Irish language were made very clear in a series of interventions. By late September, the nationalist Minister for Education had been subjected to over 400 Assembly questions, more than all the other departments together. Those pertaining to Irish-medium education are given below. A motion was introduced describing Irish as a political weapon. The unionist Health Minister had stopped all advertising and press releases in Irish and Ulster-Scots on grounds of cost. Patients' needs were cited by some members of the Assembly. The policy had been introduced five years previously by a nationalist minister. Translation services would be still available on request, not automatically; certain documents would be translated; correspondence would be accepted (presumably measures which would ensure compliance with the Charter of the Council of Europe). The minister with responsibility for linguistic diversity (DCAL) had questioned the ability of the 10% returning as Irish speakers in the Census to complete the Irish version of the Census form without the help of the English version. He expressed the hope to equalise funding for speakers of Ulster-Scots (2%) with the funding for Irish speakers. During October 2007, the possible road traffic dangers of the proposed legislative amendment in this area of policy were raised and a motion put to end the use of Irish in the Assembly and in correspondence from ministerial departments. The motion was not carried. The Assembly's Standing Orders permits members and ministers to speak in their language of choice. Unionist and nationalist newspapers reported these events from their differing perspectives, the unionist News Letter making clear opposition to the Act for Irish. It was hardly surprising then that it was reported that the PUP member put it to the Party's Annual Conference on 13 October that maturity was called for, that the major parties should tackle the tough issues, among which she listed the Act for Irish, agree to disagree and move on.

When the DCAL minister (DUP) eventually put his views before the Assembly on 16 October, they were not entirely unexpected.

- *On the basis of the replies to the second consultation exercise, an Act for Irish would not secure 'sufficient consensus'. (There had been 11,000 replies and 629 names appended to a petition; 7,500 or 65% were in favour of some form of legislation; 35% against).*
- *The estimated 'compelling costs' of a schemes-based (as opposed to a rights-based) Act over ten years could hardly be borne by departments given the financial situation. The overall costs had been calculated at some £291,538,000 on current expenditure. If local government and other functions were added to the 22,000 persons in the Civil Service, an exponential rise would be incurred to cover the official activities of an additional 110,000 persons. (That the moneys from Britain for the incoming Executive were less than expected may have influenced the presentation of costs, particularly since the two Governments of Westminster and Dublin had been involved in the commitments of the St. Andrews Agreement).*

The minister then was 'unpersuaded' to introduce an Irish language bill 'at this time'. Political sensitivity, costs, lack of public appetite and the fact of the Charter were his reasons as given to the Assembly. While he had not consulted with the departmental Committee in advance, he intended to do so to seek 'common ground' and to return again to the Assembly. In effect, the minister was not denying, but delaying, legislation. The consultation process was not yet over. Current expenditure on Irish would continue. He also clearly stated the following, despite being unconvinced that an Act would necessarily increase speakers:

Let not the message go out that I have decided in a sectarian or bigoted way, to move against the Irish-language community.

The reaction took various forms. On the political front, the Assembly was required to vote if it intended to abrogate its responsibility in this area to Westminster. Both Dublin and Westminster wished the Assembly to find its own way forward. The Chief Commissioner of the NI Human Rights Commission drew the ire of unionists when she considered that the rights of Irish speakers failed to meet international standards on the use of minority languages and wrote to the Northern Ireland Secretary to ask how it was intended to put this right as well as how the British Government planned to meet its obligations under the EU Convention. Meetings were sought between nationalist parties' representatives and the NI Secretary for State. These parties are still confident that a language bill will

eventually come. The ROI minister with responsibility for Irish professed himself willing to work with his NI counterpart on the issue. Since the St. Andrews Agreement is an inter-governmental agreement, Dublin is expected to continue to remind Westminster of the commitment to an Act for Irish. This may prove more difficult than heretofore, given the change of government in London.

Language activists embarked on several types of actions. Legal action to repeal the 1737 Act on English as the language of the courts was considered. Legal action against the minister was not possible as he had not actually refused the language legislation. Nationalist ministers were urged to introduce language schemes in their departments as would have occurred if the Language Act had been brought in. Meetings were arranged with politicians in Dublin and in Brussels (attended by *Foras na Gaeilge*) with the Irish Permanent Representation, the Commission (Multilingualism), members of the European Parliament and with the Parliament's Intergroup for Minority Languages. As a result, the issue may be raised with the British-Irish Council. The organisation *Pobal* sought stronger commitments from the UK Government in the Charter of the Council of Europe. It began a new campaign with the slogan *Tá don Ghaeilge* (Yes to/for Irish). *Sinn Féin* called for the establishment of the office of *Coimisinéir*. In May 2008, the forum *POBAL* made a formal presentation to the all-party Committee attached to DCAL where a range of matters relating to the Irish language was discussed. Two specific requests were made: that the Committee impress on the Minister the need to strengthen the commitments under Part III of the Charter and that these be then incorporated into domestic legislation; that DCAL establish a supervisory mechanism which would, in contact with the Irish language sector, develop policy and strategy for the language and also maintain a watching brief on the judicial review of the 1737 Act.

CORPUS PLANNING

Some references are made in the text to arrangements on translation and to expert committees in the context of DCAL and the NICCEA (Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment). In the initial stages of implementation of the Charter for RMLs, it was reported that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) provides a translation support service to other departments and had established a committee of Language Experts towards standardisation of terminology and style. Because of the increasing volume of work, it had extended from 9 to 13 the staff available to deal with Irish. A central service was mooted rather than the several support services in the Assembly, the NI Office, and DCAL as was in operation at that time. The NI Court Service considered itself equipped to deal with the then level of demand, in both areas of interpretation and translation. Under Article 9, *Judicial Authorities*, it was noted that translation of statutory texts was ongoing and that three were currently available in Irish: the Education Order 1998 (NI); the North South Co-operation Order 1999 (NI, in part); the Northern Ireland Act 1998, Chapter 47.

SUMMARY ON LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISION FOR IRISH

From one perspective, it would have to be admitted that a sea change has occurred since 1998. From another, progress is seen as agonisingly slow and at times appears frustrated at every turn. It is difficult not to agree with the assessment that the Charter as it currently stands will never be enough, that it was no more than a necessary first step. The options for real progress appear to be that either more stringent provisions of the Charter are accepted by the UK Government or else the concept of facilitatory legislation for the Irish language in NI. The latter is the desired option of the NI Irish language community and has now been accepted in the political sphere through the proposed Act mentioned in the St. Andrews Agreement of October 2006. In terms of the Charter, the political problem is compounded by the linking of Irish and Ulster-Scots under the Charter on the one hand, and the linking of Irish and what are described as 'other minority languages', or 'speakers in ethnic minorities who have little or no English', on the other hand. Solutions for Irish must deal with the language on its own terms, historical and contemporary, as the indigenous language, with concomitant legislative support for its speakers, actual and potential, it is contended.

From the general context viewpoint, however, it is difficult not to reach the conclusion that attitudes, as expressed in political fora, have still some way to go before the Irish language is genuinely seen as 'cultural wealth', the possession of all who wish it. This fact will inevitably have a delaying effect on political action.

ACQUISITION OF IRISH THROUGH EDUCATION

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The teaching of Irish and respect for its cultural heritage had a long history in NI. In the past, it benefited from its then existing *Gaeltacht* areas, Gaelic speakers from Scotland, radical Presbyterianism influenced by revolutionary politics in America and in France and later the influx of those fleeing famine in the 1840s. It benefited also from the interest in native music and the harp. In the late eighteenth century, Irish was already being taught in the Belfast Academy. Resources for teaching the language were produced during the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century: dictionaries, primers and methodological exemplars. Members of the Protestant churches were prominent in all these endeavours. Recent history, however, gradually changed that as is shown in the opening section of the Consultation Paper on the proposed Act for Irish arising out of the St Andrews Agreement of October 2006:

...the wider context is one in which Northern Ireland is now trying to come to terms with a troubled past where symbols and cultural identities – not least language – have been deeply contested. As a result, there is a range of political sensitivities that need to be fully considered in bringing forward proposals for Irish language legislation in Northern Ireland. These are sensitivities that do not pertain to anything like the same extent in other parts of the UK or the Republic of Ireland. However, it is instructive to note that recent legislative and policy support for the Welsh language was, for the preceding decades, controversial, yet it is now an accepted and welcomed part of mainstream life in Wales.

IRISH AS CURRICULAR AREA

Irish as a subject area has always had to fight over the years for a position on the curriculum in NI. Even recently it has not received the same attention as has Irish-medium education from either the Minister or from the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in NI. Both the official and community attitude to policy has seemed to be seen only in terms of the Irish-medium sector without due consideration of the larger context of current and future attitudinal support for policy and the supply of personnel, both educational and administrative. Public comment and discussion, largely in the Irish language media, has concentrated almost 100% on the Irish-medium sector although materials for students preparing for examination in Irish are published. Apart from political factors, this may be due to the relative administrative ease of dealing with an easily defined Irish-medium sector, still contained although developing, but in a fairly structured way, with easily identifiable spokespersons. However, regarding Irish in education as a continuum, and as a more widespread element of education, from subject only, through elements of bilingualism, to total Irish-medium, each step supporting the next, appears to be a concept not to be considered by many Irish activists as constituting a viable option in the particular circumstances of NI.

In the NI section on education in the UK second report to the Council of Europe Committee of Experts (COMEX) on implementation of the Charter, the following fairly dismissive remarks appear. In relation to primary education: 'Schools can choose to make provision for the teaching of Irish as a second language if they so wish'. In relation to postprimary education: 'Schools can choose to make provision for the teaching of Irish as a way of fulfilling the requirement for pupils in secondary education to study a modern language'. Both statements place the onus on the school; neither statement shows a very welcoming attitude; both are examples of minimalism and are not indicative of the entire context. There is quite a gap between these statements of official policy with regard to Irish and the situation now pertaining with regard to Welsh and even *Gáidhlig* of late. In the report of *Pobal* to COMEX, the view expressed is that 'all parents should have the right to have their children taught Irish as an integral part of their schooling'. However, the discussion in the otherwise meticulous *Pobal* report did not move beyond this.

Irish tends to be taught as a subject in the upper classes of some schools in the Roman Catholic primary maintained sector and, at postprimary level, in a proportion of the maintained Roman Catholic schools, which are largely but not exclusively grammar schools, and also in the newer integrated schools. Estimates place the number of postprimary schools in these categories offering Irish as between 80 and 116 and the number of students at 25/26,000 plus. It is even more difficult to quantify the number of primary schools offering Irish. Applicants for the GCSE examination in Irish are probably the best indicator at the moment of Irish at postprimary level since applicants are

categorised by educational institution.

It is to be noted that—unlike Welsh—Irish in Northern Ireland does not have a central part in the (regional) national core curriculum in the UK. In NI, education is compulsory from age 4 to 16 when the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination is taken. There are four Key Stages in compulsory education: 1 (Primary 1–4); 2 (Primary 5–7); 3 (Postprimary 1–3); 4 (Postprimary 4–5). State funded schools are required to follow a core compulsory curriculum at postprimary level which includes English and Language Studies. As a result of intense lobbying in the past, Irish was included with the other options of French, German, Italian and Spanish under Language Studies in the revised curriculum implemented by Brian Mawhinney through the Education Reform Order 1989. Study of Irish is statutory in the Irish-medium sector. The minimum time allocation advised for the compulsory curriculum is around 60%. Schools have discretion to use the remaining time to extend the core curriculum time or attempt additional subjects. Irish must then be taught as part of the core in Irish-medium education or may figure as an additional subject in other schools at postprimary level to Key Stage 4. A recent (2002) curricular review proposed replacing ‘subjects’ with ‘curricular areas’ (e.g. Communication), reducing the time for languages, and concentrating on skills transfer instead of knowledge, in the interests of flexibility and student interest. This approach could further marginalise the position of Irish, particularly in the non-grammar school sectors. Teachers of Irish, through their support organisation, *Comhar an Tuaiscirt*, expressed dismay in their submission at the repercussions for the position of Irish inherent in these new proposals.

Some schools were already anticipating this trend. Irish as a subject lost ground in the aftermath of the 1989 Education Reform Order, both in schools and in examination statistics in NI. The Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) is also now considering pushing language teaching downwards into upper primary level. It remains to be seen whether this move will benefit Irish, or whether the sector in general is ready for it. However, there may exist more experience and expertise available for Irish at this level, if it were co-ordinated and organised, than exists for the other modern continental languages.

By Spring 2004, intimations from the CCEA were that there would be ‘entitlement’ to Irish at Key Stage 3 but that Irish would remain optional at Key Stage 4 (age 14-16), which precedes the examination General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). In view of the other pressures and changes to the curriculum, Irish would undoubtedly lose out. The Draft Education Order circulated for consultation, to which replies had to be made by early March 2006, did not allay fears. Section 18 of this Draft Order required the Board of Governors of a grant-aided school to provide to recognised pupils who are in Key Stage 4 access to ‘at least the specified number of qualifying courses of which at least one shall be a course in an official language of the European Community (other than English and Irish)’. The basis for lobbying by teachers of Irish sought to have the same wording for Key Stage 4 as for Key Stage 3; ‘any official language of the European Community (other than English and, in Irish speaking schools, Irish)’, particularly since Irish is now an official language of the Community. In the event, successful lobbying by official and voluntary pressure groups succeeded in ensuring the amendment sought. In effect, the status of Irish in the NI curriculum has improved now from the position it held under the 1989 Order.

IRISH AND PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS

Syllabi and examinations are provided, as for any other curricular area, by the Curriculum Council (CCEA) and Examination Boards. Up to 2002, Irish continued to be the modern language most generally examined, after French, in the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) examination, with generally good results. It is currently in third place, slightly behind Spanish. However, Irish represents no more than 20–21% of the number presenting for French although numbers rose in 2007. A different examination under the Irish version *Gaeilge* for Irish-medium schools has been provided by the CCEA since 1993. Three years later, 1996, the provision of Irish-medium examinations was provided for other curricular areas taught through Irish in Irish-medium schools. The dedicated link for Irish on the CCEA website offers a variety of courses within the GCSE for both advanced students and those with little experience of the language. English is offered as both English and English Literature (just over fifty per cent of the numbers taking English will take English Literature).

Irish at GCSE 2001–2005

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Applicants	2,595	2,771	2,820	2,630	2,453

Irish and *Gaeilge* at GCSE 2005: Gender (total students 2,519)

Irish			<i>Gaeilge</i>		
Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
1,390	1,063	2,453	31	35	66

Irish at GCSE 2005: Origin of Students (total students 2,453)

Grammar Sector	Non-Grammar Sector	Further Education	Other
1,120	1,088	61	184

It is to be noted that non-school adult learners constituted approximately 10 per cent of the GCSE applicants in 2005.

A-Level results 2007 (Provisional)

Gender		Grades		%				
Female	Male	Total	A	B	C	ABC	D	E & Lwr.
188	91	279	49.9	26.1	16.5	92.5	3.9	3.6

Over 50% of females gained an A grade. However, while grades were high, the number of candidates had dropped from 328 (220 female and 108 male) in 2006. In 2006, the distribution of A grades was more even, 49.1% female and 50.9% male. Candidates for the AS (Advance Supplementary) examination, between GCSE and A-level, stood at 381 in 2006 and 341 in 2007. The reported rise in GCSE candidates for Irish in 2007 may reflect in A-levels in later years.

Irish is one of the list of subjects on the National Curriculum in England and may be presented for both GCSE and A-level examinations. Some primary schools, e.g. in the London parish of Southwark and attached to the University of Warwick, offered Irish. The Irish Government gave some support to these initiatives through provision of materials and in-service for teachers. Teachers and their classes paid visits to Ireland and to Summer Colleges.

Educationalists in NI, and politicians North and South, have been calling for closer alignment of curricula and examinations for Irish and Irish-medium education throughout the island of Ireland. The February 2006 policy document of the SDLP party makes a series of recommendations including alignment of curricula and examinations and in the provision of multi-media resources for the teaching of Irish as subject. A single joint body for the development of Irish-medium education is also proposed and has been discussed with the NI *Iontaobhas* (Trust) *na Gaelscolaíochta*, for which State funding is decreasing. A Forum to co-ordinate all aspects of Irish in education North and South is also proposed as are closer ties between colleges of education to enable the qualifying examination for teachers trained outside Ireland to be offered in NI. A body was very recently set up to ensure collaboration between Irish-medium education in NI and in the surrounding border counties of the Republic (*Gaelscolaíocht Éireann*, mid 2006).

IRISH-MEDIUM EDUCATION

STATISTICS

There are Irish-medium institutions in NI at pre-primary, primary and postprimary level that are now State supported to some level in most cases. The figures below have been supplied by the voluntary agencies, *Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta* and *Gaelscoileanna*, for the year 2003–2004.

Irish-medium education in Northern Ireland 2003–2004 [Source: FNT & *Gaelscoileanna*]

Naíonraí		Primary				Postprimary			
Groups	Children	Schools	Pupils	Families	Teachers	Schools	Pupils	Families	Teachers
38	860	28	2,061	1,462	120	3	481	300	167

There may exist overlap between families having children at both levels. Nevertheless, 31 primary and postprimary schools were providing Irish-medium education for 2,542 pupils and serving the

needs of 1,762 families, while providing employment for 287 teachers in Northern Ireland. Almost without exception, these schools are constantly growing as is the sector in general as recent figures indicate. A barometer of the change is shown in the history of the postprimary school in Belfast. It began as *Meánscoil* (secondary school) *Feirste* in 1991 with two full-time teachers and nine pupils, operating from the local *Cultúrlann* largely on voluntary contributions, in a building then not as developed as it is now. By 2006, now *Coláiste* (college) *Feirste*, it was moving towards 500 pupils, had 37 full-time teachers, was mainstreamed in the State system, had moved into State supported new buildings, offered a comprehensive curriculum, and had results always among the top seven schools in NI. Back in 1971, there was one Irish-medium primary school in Belfast with 17 pupils. The sector has come a long way as the statistics below, provided by *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta* (Council for Irish-medium education), illustrate.

Irish-medium education in Northern Ireland 2005-2006 [Source: CNAG]

	<i>Naíonraí</i>	Primary	Postprimary	Total
Schools	44	31	3	78
Pupils	937	2,405	585	3,927

RESEARCH

Research conducted for the NI Department of Education among past pupils (April 2002) also shows the high quality of education taken through the medium of Irish. Some of the key points noted were:

- *the academic attainment of former pupils was higher than might be expected when viewed in the context of patterns of achievement among the population of the same age group*
- *amongst interviewees there was a strong sense of engagement with the idea of the Irish language and culture, and a strong ‘pioneering’ aspect – particularly from those involved in the early years of the sector*
- *the picture that emerges from the study is of a small yet strong educational sector that has undergone a long period of struggle to establish itself on a sustainable base.*

STRUCTURES AND SUPPORT

This development is largely due, not only to voluntary effort and determination, but also to the official policy initiated by the Minister of Education appointed by the devolved government after the Belfast (1998) Agreement which saw new criteria and investment in the Irish-medium sector as well as new State-supported structures: *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta* and *Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta*. This approach also facilitated the development of a specific module for teachers in St. Mary’s University College of Education funded at £100,000 annually and medium-specific syllabi and examinations from the official CCEA culminating in the establishment of an Irish-medium Unit within the CCEA, part-funded by *Foras na Gaeilge*. Some problems still exist with regard to the supply of teachers available for aspects of examination setting, script correcting, and general translation, since the Irish-medium sector is as yet too small to ensure supply itself. Renewed investment in the provision of teaching materials followed through the *Áisaonad* set up at St. Mary’s which is also funded by *Foras*. The Education and Library Boards are also co-operating in their areas. Overall, as a result primarily of political will following public will from 2000 onwards, the Irish-medium sector may be said to be, for the first time, served by a co-ordinated and structured official framework that may yet be lacking in the Republic. Unfortunately, some problems began to occur during the Direct Rule period with regard to the required criteria for recognition, retrenchment in funding and the proposed restructuring of public administration.

Pobal pointed out the following at that period:

- *with regard to preschooling, only 2 of the 44 preschools were statutorily recognized; the remaining 42 were funded through the EU Peace and Reconciliation Fund*
- *the enrolment criterion of 24 was too high for Irish-medium preschools; the pupil/teacher ratio should be reduced in view not only of historic disadvantage but in recognition of the linguistically educational context*
- *in the case of primary gaelscoileanna, 5 of the schools were not yet recognized and therefore required immense voluntary and community input; criteria were difficult to attain and planned schools have*

- had to fold, not only disappointing those families ready to place their children in Irish-medium education but negatively affecting any future initiatives since intake had to be 15 for recognition
- of the 3 postprimary schools, the stand alone Coláiste Feirste was developing well; the other two were streams attached to existing schools, Scoil Chaitríona in Armagh and Scoil Bhríde in Derry
- the problems for development in this postprimary sector included: intake criteria for recognition of 50 students, based on the integrated sector, but which is too high for the Irish-medium sector; financial problems associated with transport since the catchment area is, of its nature, much wider; lack of appropriate resources; lack of subject teachers to teach through the medium of Irish – only Coláiste Feirste is currently in a position to offer the full curriculum through Irish
- there was lack of teachers at all levels, whether for Irish as subject or medium.
- definition of what constitutes resources comes under different headings

Educational resources were gradually coming on stream. However, the BBC had refused to provide an Irish version of the digital curriculum because user numbers were not high enough to warrant expenditure. For children with any type of special needs or speech difficulty, there was neither equality of choice nor provision. Ancillary staff and health professionals dealing with Irish-medium children require awareness and training in what constitutes bilingualism.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2002) is an independent agency. It quite quickly devised a strategic development plan for Irish-medium education across NI and was engaged in implementation. This would involve some new schools in some 20 areas over 10 years. It had launched a website in early 2005. Permission had been received for teachers to have time off to attend its annual congresses. It was liaising closely with the Education and Library Boards. However, if one or two supra-educational authorities subsume all existing bodies by 2009, as envisaged in the proposed overhaul of public administration, the integrity of this development plan and all that it entails could not be guaranteed. It was concerned that the reply of the (Direct Rule) Minister for Education to the Review of Public Administration, while indicating continued support for the existing Irish-medium sector, made no reference to future development. This attitude is in contradiction with the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement where development of the sector is clearly envisaged. Comhairle currently has a clear developmental function. Even with representation on any new proposed body, which was not guaranteed, this role could be totally eroded. Another problem is the erosion of voluntary agencies when their vision is realised and they are replaced by official organs. Gaeloiliúint as a support agency moved into other areas of need and gradually wound down its activities. An SDLP spokesman maintained that Comhairle should not only be maintained, but that it should be put on a statutory basis, its role clearly defined, and its functions increased. In addition, funding on a *per capita* basis for pupils in the sector was considered inequitable.

The body also has to deal with ongoing negativity from some quarters in relation to non-compliance with the Charter on the part of public bodies in correspondence and the like. There was, for example, no Irish or bilingual version of the transfer form used by parents when specifying their choice of school as children transfer from primary to postprimary. Lack of resources is cited by the non-compliant bodies or Irish is considered only in the context of 'languages other than English'. A parliamentary question from a unionist representative at Westminster on expenditure received an interesting reply (end 2004) demonstrating that the Irish-medium sector was cheaper and had a lower teacher/pupil ratio than the other sectors.

Sector	Irish-med (Belfast)	Integrated	Maintained	Governed
Median figure per pupil £ST	2,971	3,508	3,252	3,661
Teacher/ Pupil Ratio	1:15	1:16.4	1:16	1:16.6

An Chomhairle received the IIP (Investment in People) Award in 2007. The present Minister for Education has initiated an internal review towards strategic planning of a kind that will best

support the growing sector on a sustainable basis. In the new Assembly, in late September 2007, unionist members, in a debate on Irish-medium education, were very concerned at recent decisions by the minister in relation to the sector on grounds of cost and efficiency and sought a clear policy from her department. A call was made for all schools, Catholic, Irish-medium and integrated, to be replaced by controlled schools.

Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta

Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta was established by DES NI in collaboration with *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta* on the model of the Trust for Integrated Schools and is responsible for *gaelscoil* sector funding. It was funded by both the Department of Education and Finance for its first four years: £ST2.3 million and a capital grant of £ST420,000 in 2005 towards preschool accommodation. The body also brought the voluntary fundraising group *Taca* (Support) under its wing. They embarked on a strategy of bringing the 10 schools then unrecognised to the required criteria for entering the mainstream system as well as trying to ensure funding for the strategic development plans of *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta*. With the announcement that no further State funding was available, the body was once again almost dependent on voluntary fundraising or other means of developing the Irish-medium sector. A welcome bequest from the United States was used for preschool education and to add to the *Ciste Traenála* (Training Fund) in order to ensure professional qualifications for those working in the sector or studying for a qualification in Irish.

An official announcement in April 2007 that up to £500,000 expended on rent for premises would be returned to the Irish-medium sector was greeted with some relief.

In early 2007, *Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta* appointed a fundraising development officer with a similar contact in the US. This resulted in funds of up to £1 million. The second phase hopes to raise £2.5 million. Since 2001, over £4 million has been distributed to the sector. In September 2007, no primary *gaelscoil* was without official recognition, three having been recognised by the minister during the Summer. In November 2007, a unionist member raised a motion in the Assembly to prevent the use by *Iontaobhas* of a departmental scheme (Club Bank) intended to help schools at Threshold One of recognition to receive bank loans.

SUMMARY ON IRISH-MEDIUM EDUCATION

CURRENT CONCERNS

Administration and legislation

Radical reform of the educational system had been promised by Spring 2008 as part of the general overhaul of administrative structures in NI and as a result of a decreasing school population. A single Education and Skills Authority has been proposed to take over the functions currently carried out by a range of bodies, in fact those responsible for running the majority of schools in NI. Control would pass to this new body from The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (520 schools and 8,500 teachers); the integrated sector (a small number of schools); the five Education and Library Boards; and the Irish language sector. The powers proposed for the new authority are wide-ranging. There was no requirement to take account of any specific interests such as Irish-medium education. Arguments have been made that the system would be undermined, that standards would be eroded and that parents would be denied choice. These reform recommendations passed to the new Executive and Assembly in May 2007. Decision has been deferred to 2009 and a strategic review of the sector initiated by the minister.

Strategic Review on Education: Bain Report

In the departmental plan, *Priorities and Budget 2004–2006*, the Irish-medium sector was not mentioned nor did it appear in the new plan for 2006–2007, beyond the usual references to a more diverse society. As part of the proposed changes for the future, the former Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast, George Bain (who had experience of bilingualism in his native Canada), was asked to write a strategic review of education in NI. In the matter of Irish-medium education, some recommendations were welcomed: the need for a comprehensive and coherent policy in view of the continuing development of the Irish-medium sector and the need for appropriate accommodation to promote learning. The report also recorded the difficulties of recruiting adequately prepared teachers at postprimary level. There was, however, concern at some other recommendations. If the criteria for

viability were rigidly applied, 40% of NI schools would close, Irish-medium schools among them. The number of pupils required to ensure viability was laid down at 140 for an urban school and 105 for a rural school. This could lead to enforced amalgamation with other schools or creation of units attached to schools. Neither solution is conducive to attaining the best results from immersion education, in the experience of *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta* and *Gaelscoileanna*.

The definition of the Irish-medium school in NI is lacking, say educationalists, as it is given solely in terms of the duration of the language of instruction, where ‘more than one half of the teaching of subjects which are compulsory contributory subjects including religious education and the minimum content of the areas of learning other than that called language and literacy is conducted (wholly or partly) in Irish and “school” includes part of a school’. If the definition were given in terms of immersion education through Irish, it should also include the cultural aim of the school, the sociolinguistic and sociocultural intentions and effects.

The concerns that the development of the sector could be halted, more stringent criteria applied and less funding made available appeared to be borne out in subsequent decisions on Irish-medium schools, even in the period pending the application of any new arrangements. During 2006, several applications were refused recognition or funding, in particular a proposed postprimary school in Cookstown for which 100 students had registered and a proposed primary school in Belfast. In the case of the latter, officials suggested that the children be sent six miles across the city.

Political concerns

The position of Minister for Education is crucial to Irish-medium education, given the polarised situation that pertains in NI. Irish-medium education flourished under a previous nationalist Minister. It was hoped that an inclusive view would also prevail in the appointments of the new Executive from May 2007. In the event, this has been the case.

IRISH-MEDIUM EDUCATION ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND

The tables below give a composite view of the development of Irish-medium education North and South.

Irish-medium education in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and Northern Ireland (NI) 2003–2004

	Primary		Postprimary		Total	
	Schools	Pupils	Schools	Pupils	Schools	Pupils
ROI	121	22,558	31	5,460	152	28,018
NI	28	2,061	3	481	31	2,542
Total	149	24,619	34	5,941	183	30,560

Irish-medium education in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and Northern Ireland (NI) 2005–2006

	Primary		Postprimary		Total	
	Schools	Pupils	Schools	Pupils	Schools	Pupils
ROI	126	22,915	33	6,132	159	29,047
NI	31	2,405	3	585	34	2,990
Total	157	25,320	36	6,717	193	32,037

Some primary schools included here may not yet be recognised schools.

GENERAL SUPPORT SYSTEM AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

COLLABORATION

The support system moves seamlessly from newly established official structures to a host of specialist voluntary organisations.

In August 2002, the Department of Education established and grant-aided a body to ensure the development of Irish-medium education, *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta* (Council for Irish-medium Education). The board of this new body is representative of the majority of the voluntary sector that had been functioning in the sector. A strategic plan 2002–2005 was agreed with all interested parties to ensure fruitful co-ordination and development of the sector across NI. Implementation and the future role of the agency depend on how public administration is configured by 2009.

In the NI Irish-medium sector, funding had always been a major issue, particularly for schools or

units awaiting official recognition. In the 1980s a fundraising group, *Taca* (Support), had been begun and managed to meet most of the demands made upon it. This has now been integrated into the new agency, *Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta* (Trust for Irish-medium Education), also established by the nationalist Minister in 2002 particularly to support schools until they obtain recognition, on a financial arrangement that matches with State moneys all funds raised voluntarily, self-help being the slogan. During its first year the agency received £1.5 million sterling from the Department for distribution. Some changes in criteria for recognition have lightened the burden somewhat but the agency has more demands than resources and feared the political effects of the continued suspension of the Assembly, fears now replaced by proposed administrative re-organisation. A critical mass of at least 60 schools is their target to ensure a sustainable Irish-medium sector.

The appointment of a Development Officer for Irish in the CCEA (Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment) to be jointly funded by the CCEA and *Foras na Gaeilge* was welcomed. The terms of the appointment are not clear, however, as to whether they will include the spectrum from subject to medium. The Library and Education Boards have Language Officers for Modern Languages who try to cater for Irish as part of their remit. There have been short term officer appointments for Irish. Teachers of Irish would prefer a permanent dedicated appointment as source of support. The British Council has subvented a scheme of Language Assistants for Irish in schools across NI, particularly with regard to oral language for examination classes, GCSE (General Certificate Secondary Education) and AS/A Levels (Advanced).

A resource unit, *An tÁisaonad*, located in St. Mary's University College of Education provides teaching materials for Irish-medium education that could be used in schools in Northern Ireland and in the Republic (Donegal). This venture had been funded through the Curriculum and Examinations Council (CCEA), from EU sources, for the particular case of Northern Ireland and had initially been located in a school. Funding now comes through *Foras na Gaeilge*. To date, *An tÁisaonad* has produced a range of quality materials for the NI Irish-medium primary sector, covering graded reading materials—fiction and non-fiction, mathematics, science, history, geography. Not all classes and key stages of the system have yet been covered.

The Deputy Chief Executive of *Foras na Gaeilge* is also Director of Education within the corporate structure of *An Foras* and heads the Belfast office. *Foras na Gaeilge* has also grant-assisted many bodies, official and voluntary, and has helped schools awaiting recognition.

Three supportive voluntary agencies have long been active in Irish-medium education. *Gaeloiliúint*, begun in 1991, had until recently been the source of advice, advocacy and training for Irish-medium schools. With the advent of new agencies, it had concentrated largely on a range of courses in further and continuing education, creating the nucleus of an Irish-medium third level sector. It is gradually phasing out, particularly since *Foras na Gaeilge* funding is now no longer available. In early education, the Belfast based organisation *Altram* (Fostering) provides training for personnel and produces resources. It is a recognised NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) provider and has recently extended both its training modules and training venues by offering courses in Derry also. The third organisation provides support of a kind not easily available to the Irish-medium sector in the Republic. GESO (*Gaeleagras um Shainriachtanais Oideachasúla*) is involved with remedial and learning support services. Both *Gaeloiliúint* and GESO have received funding from *Foras na Gaeilge*.

Summer colleges are organised in the Donegal *Gaeltacht* by *Comhaltas Uladh* (1927), of the Gaelic League, and by others. The voluntary organisation *Gael-Linn* developed a 'Cultural Enrichment' programme which was taken in a good proportion of schools of Protestant ethos. It also organises many ancillary activities for schools. The *Ultach* Trust (*An tIontaobhas Ultach*) is a resource that may be called upon in specific instances. *Comhar an Tuaiscirt* is the representative voluntary organisation for teachers of Irish as a subject in NI.

Some years ago, the Minister for Education in the Republic announced in public that he wished for much closer collaboration across the curriculum and sectorally between his Department and colleagues in the North. This has occurred to some extent in the case of recognition for incoming primary teachers from NI who have already acquired a qualification in Irish in NI. [One area where harmonisation might be effected is in the designation of official criteria for recognition of a *gaelscoil*. In NI, 12 pupils sufficed in a rural area and 15 in an urban area. In the Republic, 17 pupils are now required irrespective of setting.](#) Another possibility might be that of curricula and examinations for Irish language. The same curriculum is currently provided in the Republic at postprimary

irrespective of the linguistic setting of the school. In NI, differentiation is made between the English and Irish-medium sectors. In fact, English-medium postprimary schools in NI must follow the particular programme of studies laid down if they have incoming pupils from the Irish-medium primary sector. Issues such as these are more political than educational in their solution as the recent policy document from the SDLP party underlines. [The announcement that the last 11 Plus examination will take place in 2008 for NI pupils is not expected to have adverse effects on Irish in schools or on Irish-medium schools. It is, however, the most significant change in the second level education system of NI since the post-WW2 era. Transfer is now proposed at the later age of 14 although the precise arrangements are not yet clear. Grammar schools are already contemplating the introduction of their own version of entrance examination at age 11.](#)

The two agencies for Irish-medium education North and South have jointly published an Irish Language Prospectus which brings together all the third level courses available throughout Ireland either on Irish as a subject or study through Irish of different disciplines. It also cites job opportunities. The first such source of similar information was produced by *Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge* in Dublin and distributed to all schools North and South as well as to guidance counsellors.

A collaborative support agency, *Gaelscolaíocht Éireann*, was recently (mid 2006) established for Irish-medium education in NI and in the border counties of the Republic.

The Ireland Fund has donated one million dollars towards the provision of a special series of the Sesame Street programme for children for NI. The aim of the series is to promote tolerance of diversity. The Irish partner is the Northern Ireland Preschools Association (NIPPA). A spokesperson has said that Irish will certainly feature on the series. Sesame Street programmes for South Africa were made in twelve official languages.

COMEX FIRST REPORT

The report of the Committee of Experts on the implementation of the European Charter with regard to Irish in NI gives an independent assessment of the situation in 2003-2004. Their findings and recommendations, which were formally accepted by the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe, in relation to education in NI were as follows.

Article 8 – Education

- **Pre-school:** *Undertaking considered fulfilled despite the fact that NGOs pointed out that no express provision had been made for the specific needs of bilingual/Irish-medium education for this age group.*
- **Primary:** *Undertaking fulfilled since expansion policy set out and being followed.*
- **Secondary:** *Considered fulfilled, although the issue of scarce teaching and other resources a cause of considerable concern.*
- **Technical or vocational education:** *On the basis of the information provided, the Experts could not form an opinion and sought more information in the UK's next report.*
- **Higher education:** *Undertaking fulfilled in relation to the study of Irish as subject, although the authorities were encouraged to investigate the interest to have instruction through Irish.*
- **Adult and continuing education:** *Undertaking fulfilled, although NGOs seek a more co-ordinated approach.*
- **Teaching of history and culture:** *Considered fulfilled through the cross-curricular theme of cultural heritage.*
- **Basic and further training of teachers:** *Fulfilled at present, although the challenge of keeping supply in line with future demand was acknowledged.*
- **Use of Irish in education, and in cultural activities, outside the territory of NI:** *The Experts were unable to conclude if fulfilled although noting that Irish is available as a subject within the curriculum in England, if chosen by pupils. The cultural undertaking was considered fulfilled since Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (traditional Irish music organisation) organises throughout the UK.*
- **Authorities' cultural policy abroad:** *Considered fulfilled, although information lacking, through the Arts Councils of NI, Ireland, and the British Council's travel awards and international residency schemes.*

TEACHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING: PRIMARY

As in the Republic, teacher training is organised on denominational lines in Northern Ireland. Irish is one of the options which may be taken by student teachers as part of the curriculum at St. Mary's University College of Education Belfast, which is attached to Queen's University. There is a four year course towards the B.Ed. degree and student teachers opting for Irish will spend time in the *Gaeltacht*. Irish is also an option within the three year B.A. degree in Liberal Arts.

Foras na Gaeilge has funded a language laboratory for St. Mary's University College.

In Northern Ireland, teachers with the B.Ed. qualification may teach students to the Key Stages corresponding to Junior Cycle postprimary stage in the ROI. No specific training exists at present, however, for teachers to teach subject matter through Irish in postprimary schools.

Trainee teachers choosing Irish as a component will have a funded residential *Gaeltacht* course as part of their education.

NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE QUALIFYING EXAMINATION IN IRISH FOR TEACHERS TRAINED OUTSIDE THE REPUBLIC (SCG)

In the Republic, special arrangements exist to ensure competence in Irish for primary teachers trained outside the State. Many of these teachers come from Northern Ireland. Arising out of political accommodations, closer ties were envisaged in education, including mutual recognition of teacher qualifications. The White Paper of 1995 again emphasized teacher mobility. The Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), historically an all-island organisation, now functioning separately north and south, was of the view that accreditation should not be dependent on skills in Irish. However, the Catholic University College of Education in Belfast does offer Irish and Irish methodology to its students since Irish is taught in some schools in NI and a developing Irish-medium sector exists.

Since September 1996, following a statement from the Minister of Education in 1995, all incoming teachers to the system in the Republic were given temporary recognition until they would have attained the Irish qualification through the examination *Scrúdú Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge* (Qualifying Examination in Irish) which is a compulsory qualification to retain a teaching post. In the beginning, incoming teachers were given two years to reach the required standard or lose this provisional recognition and be paid only as untrained personnel. Only teachers whose qualifications are recognized by the DES may sit the examination. The position of Irish language organisations was that all assistance should be given to enable teachers to attain competence as class teachers of Irish. However, the failure rate was high in the examination: in 2001-2002 there was an average failure rate of 45%; in 2003, of 599 sitting the examination, almost 75% failed the written component, 70% failed the aural, and 50% the oral (which is not really a very poor result after two years of exposure as part of a full time working life). In the October 2003 examination, less than 35% of candidates passed all four modules.

Since the primary teacher is a classroom teacher, rather than a subject specialist as at second level, it is considered more educationally sound not to have peripatetic teachers for certain areas of the curriculum. In addition, the revised primary curriculum in the Republic envisages the use of Irish as a language of communication in the classroom and in the school, and the use of Irish as language of instruction is encouraged as a logical extension of the communicative methodology underlying the language curriculum. The general approach to teaching Irish is similar in NI. Competence in language is then required.

Nevertheless, the INTO in Northern Ireland called on the INTO in the Republic, in March 2004, to 'actively campaign' for the abolition of the Irish competency test on the grounds of 'inequality of opportunity' for INTO Northern members. This could, however, be seen as inequity and lack of parity by Southern members. Some politicians in NI have called for an all-Ireland solution through the two Departments of Education and the Colleges of Education, north and south, and the provision of appropriate courses towards the awarding of the qualification, in order to prevent the use of the Irish language as a divisive mechanism. Discussion on this aspect is ongoing (2006) since it has been put forward as a firm proposal in the policy document of the SDLP recently launched in Dublin. A report presented to the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (June 2004) found that there exists a shortage of Protestant and of Presbyterian teachers and refers to the difficulty of the qualifying Irish examination for incoming teachers from NI. There are

in the region of 200 Protestant primary schools in the south of which 16 are under Presbyterian patronage while some others have shared patronage, Church of Ireland/Methodist. Teachers for primary schools under the patronage of the Protestant churches receive their professional training and education in the Republic in the Church of Ireland College of Education, an associate college of the University of Dublin. Irish is a normal component of the curriculum and until relatively recently this College was served by the last remaining preparatory college, *Coláiste Moibhí*. In NI, Stranmillis College does not include Irish on its curriculum since Irish is not normally taught in Protestant primary schools.

Accommodation was reached between the DES in Dublin and St. Mary's University College of Education in Belfast in relation to graduates of that college who already possessed an Irish language qualification.

The success of the approach and the materials pioneered by *Coláiste Mhuire* Marino of the Marino Institute of Education in Dublin, as co-ordinator of the SCG scheme, in very recent times has been greeted by the INTO in the Republic. The levels of failure in the examination have dropped considerably and the candidates prepared for use of Irish in their classrooms. However, the INTO in Northern Ireland consider that teachers from NI should not have to pay for either attending courses in Irish or for undergoing the SCG examination, citing the two months with pay allowed to teachers by the Free State, in the early days, to attend classes in the *Gaeltacht*, in order to fulfill State policy for Irish.

The Northern secretary of the INTO recently (2006) explained that his organisation was in talks with the Department of Education towards the provision in the north of a dedicated resource centre to provide the SCG. Stranmillis Education College agreed to the course being sited at St. Mary's University College, if their students have access to it. The Ulster dialect was one of the other concerns of the INTO in NI.

TEACHER EDUCATION THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF IRISH

Teacher education through the medium of Irish began in 1996, following the 1993 Review of Teacher Education. It may be taken through the four year honours B.Ed course (where some subjects may be taken bilingually) or through a post graduate course, the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), which constitutes a second route into Irish-medium schools. Teaching practice may be in English or Irish-medium schools. A Certificate in Bilingual Education is also awarded. Comprehensive teacher preparation for Irish-medium postprimary schools is not yet available. However, more structural progress appears to have been made in NI towards teacher education for the Irish-medium sector than has happened to date in the Republic, with some exceptions. The course is jointly funded by the NI Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Learning at approximately £ST100,000 per annum.

INSERVICE

Inservice training for teachers of Irish is provided in part through the annual and other meetings organised by *Comhar an Tuaiscirt*, through *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta* and through the Education and Library Boards in summer courses. The voluntary organisation, *Gael-Linn*, collaborates in mounting some of these courses. This organisation has been involved for a long time in supporting Irish in education in NI. Inservice for Irish-medium teachers is being developed through the various partners. Staff seconded to the Library Boards system advise and assist the Irish-medium system. A phonics system for Irish has been developed as part of this collaboration.

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

The pattern for Irish at university level in Northern Ireland is similar to that in the Republic. Irish may be studied in both universities to doctorate level and new courses have been introduced to satisfy new linguistic needs.

Queen's University, Belfast, offers all the Celtic languages with Irish and has recently begun a Diploma (or M.A.) in Translation, subvented by the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. The University of Ulster (UU) is a multi-campus institution. It offers an innovative, and very popular, Diploma in Irish, *ab initio*, which may be studied on a full or part time basis, depending on venue, and may be used towards a degree or as a stand alone certification, in all its campuses and

outreach centres, some in the Donegal *Gaeltacht*. There are currently a significant number of students attending across the North: in Coleraine, Belfast, Derry and, until recently, Armagh, (Northern Ireland); Annagry, Downings (Donegal). This Irish language section of the UU received full marks, 24 of 24, in the official Teaching Assessment conducted by the UK authorities.

In December 2006, a student at Queen's insisted on receiving his academic certificate in Irish and with his name correctly spelt. He considers himself to be the first to do so.

In addition to EU regulations, arrangements exist that allow students from NI who wish to follow third level courses through Irish in the ROI to be funded by NI. Students from the ROI who receive Leaving Certificate scholarships may similarly use them in NI institutions.

Irish, and Irish Studies, are taught at universities in the UK.

However, the Students' Union at QUB is considered less than welcoming of Irish. *An Cumann Gaelach* (The Irish Society) draws a comparison with how their student society is treated by the Union in contrast to issues pertaining to Ulster-Scots. As late as December 2007, a poster was removed which contained two words in Irish.

FURTHER EDUCATION

Courses in Irish are available at some NI Further Education Colleges.

Forbairt Feirste is an economic development agency in West Belfast which functions through the medium of Irish. It has developed a specific education project to answer the needs of Irish-medium students who do not wish to follow the A-levels course, but still wish to continue their education through Irish. Courses are provided through Irish in business, secretarial skills and childcare and are certified through the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education. This initiative towards employment, *I dTreo na Fostaíochta*, is well regarded by the Department of Employment and Learning which continues to fund it. [Having continued as a pilot programme for some five years, the issue remained as to how mainstreaming might occur without losing the experience and accrued benefits.](#) The Department acknowledges the special role of Irish in further education and considers this an important aspect of policy for the future which it intends to discuss further with Irish language organisations and providers (mid 2006). From September 2004, the FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) course in childcare developed in the Republic is available to students.

The voluntary organisation *Gaeloiliúint* (Gael-training or education) had been long involved in providing informal training for personnel for Irish-medium preschooling and upwards. Since some of these needs were now served within the State-funded system, the organisation changed its direction to the principle of Irish-medium tertiary level education under the title of *An Bradán Feasa* (the Salmon of Knowledge), taken from a tale in one of the early sagas. While this venture did not eventually come to fruition, the initial concept lives on and is now directed more towards planning for collaborative research across tertiary institutions in Belfast, Dublin and Scotland.

When still functioning for a period in the provision of courses, *An Bradán Feasa* offered short courses for all levels in Irish and trilingual courses had been advertised, in partnership with other institutions: Irish-medium academic and vocational courses in Teacher Training (postgraduate Certificate), Counselling Childcare (Certificate), Irish (Diploma), as well as Environmental Studies, Counselling Skills, Cultural Enrichment, Language Acquisition, Personal and Community Development. They could be accessed generally on a part time basis at four different venues across Northern Ireland: Belfast, Derry, Tyrone, Ballycastle. The first certificates of year long courses were presented to students in May 2004 by the previous Minister for *Gáidhlig* in Scotland. The work of *An Bradán Feasa* at that time was recognised by *Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge* in Galway and by the Millenium Project of the University of the Highlands and Islands in Scotland. Discussions were held with Queen's University in Belfast and with the University of Ulster so that degree courses might be offered. Funding of £500,000 sterling over three years was being sought from *Foras na Gaeilge*. The focus of *An Bradán Feasa* is now, however, being directed more towards research-based cross-community activities involving NI, the ROI and Scotland.

ADULT & CONTINUING EDUCATION

In NI, institutions may offer short courses in co-operation with Irish voluntary organisations or community development groups. One such example in July-August 2004 was a 100 hour course

over four weeks offered by the North West Institute of Further and Higher Education in Derry, in co-operation with *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta* NI, at a cost of £25 sterling per student. This course was an improver course for those with Irish already with one of the intentions being to help them prepare for existing employment opportunities. It ended with a weekend in the nearby Donegal *Gaeltacht*. *Comhaltas Uladh* and *Conradh na Gaeilge* or cultural centres as *An Chultúrlann* (Belfast), *Cumann Chluain Ard* (Belfast), *An Gaeláras* (Derry) or *Tí Chulainn* (Armagh) will offer courses. Courses for parents are popular. An example is the weekend ‘mini-*Gaeltacht*’ organised by *Gaelphobal an tSratha Bháin* (Irish community of Strabane) in a centre in the Sperrin mountains.

The enrolment criteria for official institutions (12–15) may militate against a course being provided in some areas. This will rarely apply in the case of Irish voluntary organisations being the providers. In many instances, *Foras na Gaeilge* provides funding for organisations. Two voluntary and community education organisations, the Ulster People’s College and the Workers’ Education Association, also provide courses in Irish language.

There are few community language organisations that do not run language courses at different levels, particularly in Northern Ireland. For example, as part of the intensive cultural, historic and arts programme of the McCracken Summer School organised in July 2003 by *Cumannn Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain* (with the co-operation of the inclusive groups *Iontaobhas*, 174 and *Shalom*, in North Belfast), over 150 learners were enrolled, from Scotland, America, Britain and Australia as well as Ireland, for an intensive week long course held at four levels of competence. While the emphasis was on Irish-medium students, classes were also held for school learners in English-medium schools.

ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

There are several examples of clubs and activities for youth, in Belfast, in Derry, in towns. The group in Strabane organise family weekends away through Irish.

In Northern Ireland, Irish Summer Colleges are run by *Comhaltas Uladh* of *Conradh na Gaeilge*. This organisation also organises competitions through the schools. Several Irish language community groups across the north have specific programmes and events for youth. *Gael-Linn* is also very active in NI.

STATUS FOR IRISH IN OTHER DOMAINS: BROADCASTING

LEGISLATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Article 4 of the subsection entitled Economic, Social and Cultural Issues in the section on Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity in the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement of 1998 specifically mentions broadcasting and film.

In the context of active consideration currently being given to the UK signing the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the British Government will in particular in relation to the Irish language, where appropriate and where people so desire it...

- *explore urgently with the relevant British authorities, and in co-operation with the Irish broadcasting authorities, the scope for achieving more widespread availability of Teilifís na Gaeilge [now TG4] in Northern Ireland*
- *seek more effective ways to encourage and provide financial support for Irish language film and television production in Northern Ireland.*

The Charter was ratified by the UK Government in July 2001 and 36 clauses chosen for implementation in relation to the Irish language. Several of these commitments related to Articles 11 and 12 of the Charter on Media and Cultural Activities and Facilities. Under Media, they include radio, audio-visual production, print media, training for journalists, as well as freedom of direct cross-border reception of radio and television. Under Cultural Activities and Facilities are included encouragement of cultural expression, literary work and film production, and access to it through a range of centres: libraries, cultural centres, museums, archives, theatres, cinemas, academies, festivals and the use of new technology.

In the Joint Declaration issued by the British and Irish Governments on 1 April 2003, the British Government reiterated that it would ‘continue to discharge all its commitments under the (Belfast) Agreement in respect of the Irish language’. In relation to broadcasting, the British Government undertook to establish a fund for financial support for Irish language film and television production, once the business plan being developed became available. In addition, both

the British and Irish Governments undertook to address the various obstacles to the reception of TG4 in Northern Ireland.

While NI is intended to have devolved government, not all functions fall within its remit. Broadcasting and communications legislation are reserved to Westminster, where NI members and NI lobbyists may make their case. In the years since 1998 and 2001, the areas of legislation affecting NI have been the Communications Bill and the Charter of the BBC. The issues have related to TG4, the BBC, the Broadcasting Fund, and Irish language local community radio.

COMMUNICATIONS ACT 2003

The comparison made in the Government White Paper on a *New Future for Communications* of December 2001 showed how Irish in NI had much less support within the UK than either Welsh or *Gàidhlig*. It did, however, re-affirm the commitments already made but not yet implemented to broadcasting in Irish, although now with the worrying proviso that such should not interfere with broadcasting in English. The Draft Bill of May 2002 did not change that position and intense lobbying ensued. The organisation *Iontaobhas Ultach* (*Ultach* Trust) had, in fact, been lobbying ceaselessly since 1991 for better media services for Irish. It continued now by, *inter alia*, organising a post card campaign to the responsible Department in Whitehall, London. Street demonstrations were held and pickets organised outside Stormont by the community umbrella group *Pobal*. Amendments to the Draft Bill were tabled by a Welsh M.P. which reached the Parliamentary Standing Committee and aroused the interest of the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin which later arranged meetings to hear the arguments of the Irish community in NI. The Irish language movement issued a Charter for the Media which included demands relating to television, radio, and the print media but no subsequent amendments were made to the Communications Act 2003.

Lobbying did, however, have an impact. Funding was provided by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in London to mount a pilot training and production course, which was managed by *Iontaobhas* during 2002 at the request of DCAL, and attended by 14 participants. This was the first real act of implementation of their broadcasting commitment by the British authorities. The Minister at the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), however, when presenting certificates to the course participants, advised them to apply to *Foras na Gaeilge* for funding to produce programmes. He also considered it within the remit of the *Foras* to provide funding for productions for TG4. The *Foras* did not agree although emergency funding was at that time being given to the soap *Ros na Rún* on TG4 due to the withdrawal of its main sponsor. Responsibility for broadcasting issues in NI had been clearly laid on the governments not on any other bodies, statutory or voluntary. However, in order to ensure practical outcomes from the training course, some production funding was eventually made available by both *Foras* and *Iontaobhas*. From 2001 to 2003, *Foras na Gaeilge* had funded the training course, *Súil Aduaidh* (View from the North).

THE BROADCASTING FUND

While no positive changes on behalf of Irish appeared in the broadcasting legislation, nevertheless in late 2002 and into 2003, a commitment was made, and agreed by the governments in London and in Dublin, to the provision of an Irish-medium production and training fund of £12m sterling (€18m) over three years, for television and film training and production, although not entirely on the lines of the arrangements that had been made for *Gàidhlig* or Welsh television which have legislative force. The fund was eventually announced in April 2004 for possible activation by July. The announcement was welcomed by Irish language interests although a radio service was still being sought. It was publicly welcomed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Republic in an article from him in the Sunday newspaper *Foinse* (02 May, 2004) in which he also praised the indomitable spirit of Irish speakers in NI.

The Fund is administered by the Commission for Film and Television in NI (NIFTC). The Commission set up an interim committee to establish the new fund and to appoint a chief executive officer to administer it. By October 2004 the reporter for TG4 in NI had been appointed to this new post and a new committee for the fund set up, *An Ciste Craoltóireachta Gaeilge* (Irish Broadcasting Fund). The Fund now has two staff, a head (*Ceannasaí*) and secretary.

Official commitment to the Broadcasting Fund was, however, contingent on the acceptance of a business plan commissioned by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) in NI. In

addition, despite the existence of precedential funding for Welsh and *Gáidhlig* broadcasting and advice that a legal report might be unnecessary, DCAL decided to seek an equality statement in order to ensure that the fund did not contravene section 75 of the NI Act 2000 and in its wake to seek permission from the EU to set up a fund that gave certain advantages to commercial entities to which they would not have entitlement if producing material in the majority EU languages. This led to further delay as the EU sought more clarification on two occasions. Doubts were raised also in relation to conditions being imposed by the Commission for those who might benefit from the fund which would prevent their seeking co-funding from other sources, as is normal practice.

There was, however, another issue also. While the figure of £12 million sterling over three years was still in place by mid 2004 during a period of direct rule from Westminster, by year end the Budget Estimates showed the same overall sum but now spread over five years. Lobbying had little effect. The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure denied that this was in reality a cut back, describing the new time frame for disbursement as re-phasing. Instead of £4m per annum for 3 years, the revised timetable was now: £1.5m for 2004-5; £1.5m for 2005-6; £3.5m for 2006-7; £4m for 2007-8; 1.5m for 2008-9. Since the fund had formed part of the Good Friday Agreement, these issues would be discussed between the two Governments. In the event, approval from the EU was received in June 2005 for the Irish Language Broadcast Fund of £ST12 million. It was initially intended to provide 90 hours of programming and training for some 45 people over the three years for a public numbered in the official note as some 25,000 persons (arising from quite conservative analyses of census returns by officialdom with regard to Irish language skills in NI).

While confirmation from Brussels was being awaited, *An Ciste Craoltóireachta* continued, through two rounds in March and April 2005, the business of seeking and assessing applications for funding under their proposed criteria. The results were announced in July 2005 on the basis of the first two years funding of *An Ciste* and the fund itself was finally launched in September 2005. Up to £3.6 million sterling was allocated. In addition, eight candidates were to begin training immediately. The programmes accepted were in the categories laid down by *An Ciste*: information (individual programmes and series); drama; series of children's programmes and entertainment series. Some development funding was also provided to five companies. Funding is provided to the production company up to 75%, the broadcasting company providing 25%. Applications from production companies must be accompanied by a letter from the broadcasting company which will broadcast the production. Initially, the broadcasting companies were three: BBCNI, RTÉ, TG4, as broadcasters having a significant audience reach in NI. This was later amended on appeal to include two locally based television broadcasters, NVTV in the Belfast region and Channel 9 in Derry. The latter may now participate in training schemes and in production applications with joint funding of £50,000.

Of more significance, perhaps, than this problem of local television broadcasters, however, were the arguments of the independent Irish language production sector in NI. In April 2005, they had formed a forum, *Léiriú* (Production), and made their concerns known then and in the aftermath of the funding allocations being announced. One of the major concerns was against the high proportion of funding being allocated to the big broadcasters in their capacity as producers, particularly if any were also members of *An Ciste*, the funding body. The view was strongly upheld that the Fund was intended to benefit and to grow the sector in NI and for the viewing audience in NI, not all over Ireland. In addition, it was pointed out that independents whose proposed programmes would be broadcast by TG4 had only to receive approbation from the Commissioning Editor of TG4, while all others faced the gauntlet of the nine members of *An Ciste*, which included the BBC. In reply, the representative of *An Ciste* pointed to the offices being maintained in NI by the independent sector from the Republic and their use of NI resources and actors. The umbrella group, *Pobal*, issued a set of recommendations which might alleviate the concerns, if accepted by *An Ciste*: transparency; active emphasis on developing the sector in NI; a representative on the board for the NI independent sector; strategic planning in consultation with that sector; allocation of 60 per cent of funding to the NI sector.

During 2006, when some of the funded programmes were broadcast, they did not receive universally favourable reviews although they had succeeded in unearthing some new talent, especially among teenage actors. The broadcasting times of programmes was also criticised.

The more important consideration probably is, however, that, despite problems and concerns,

the Fund is now activated and functioning and helping to ensure a sounder base for the industry in NI as well as greater diversity of programming. In recognition of its cross-border work, *An Ciste* received a *Gradam Gaisce Tras-Teorann* (Cross-Border Achievement Award) in March 2006. These awards were organised by the (then) NI newspaper, Daily Ireland (the Irish newspaper *Lá Nua* belongs in the same stable).

The first graduates of the two courses run annually by the Fund received their certificates in August 2006: eight students from Irish language production companies and four from local stations, Channel 9 Derry and Northern Visions Belfast (NvTv). Up to 70 hours of programming in Irish per annum is now produced with funding from *An Ciste Craoltóireachta Gaeilge* (CCG). It has then a strong economic role also.

However, the first budget of the new devolved Assembly (the first since 2001) in October 2007 contained no mention of the Fund beyond 2009 thus giving the impression that the NI Executive would not be supporting the initiative from its own sources. An independent survey showed that it had met its aims in increasing viewers (from 39% of respondents in 2006 to 47% in 2007) and had much success with the programmes produced with its assistance.

THE ROYAL CHARTER OF THE BBC

The recommendations of the Committee of Experts (COMEX) on the implementation of the Charter of the Council of Europe by the UK Government were formally accepted by the Council of Ministers in March 2004. The resolution thereon accepted recommended, *inter alia*, that priority be given to improving television in Irish through public service provision. In the context of NI, this meant especially the public service broadcaster, the BBC, which is, for example, in receipt of public funding through licence fees to ensure such provision. While the independent television sector also has some public service broadcasting obligations, the fortunes of the BBC are inextricably linked to television services in Irish in NI.

The BBC operates under a Royal Charter, under an Agreement with the UK Government which details its editorial independence and its public obligations, and under a Funding Settlement. The Charter is reviewed approximately every ten years since 1927. The then current Charter period was to end in 2006/2007. Each review may set out differing priorities. One of the major perspectives this time was preparation for the digital age. Minister Tessa Jowell set out the UK Government view from the outset and asked for ‘a vigorous and open debate about the kind of BBC we want for the future’.

We need to ask ourselves what we want and expect the BBC to deliver: what range and scale of services it should provide.

The review process began in 2003. It was highly consultative: [the Government independent adviser ran a series of public fora](#); [three parliamentary committees considered the review of the Charter \(Parliamentary, Commons and Lords\)](#); [research papers were commissioned](#); [the Office of Communications \(Ofcom\) prepared submissions on public service broadcasting for the future \(PSB\)](#). [Green and White Papers were published and submissions requested for each](#). The entire process was accompanied by intense lobbying on the part of the Irish language sector at every step. *Iontaobhas Ultach* (Trust), the umbrella group *Pobal* and the statutory *Foras na Gaeilge* all made submissions to the various bodies involved: the relevant Westminster Minister and Department, the Committees of Parliament, Ofcom, the BBC itself, and made their views known in the different consultative fora.

Their arguments were largely two. The public sector broadcasting aspect of the BBC was not being fulfilled in relation to speakers of Irish in NI; unlike Welsh and Irish, there was no statutory obligation on the BBC to provide programming in Irish. The discrepancy between expenditure on the other two indigenous heritage Celtic languages and expenditure on Irish was huge, even though Irish speakers contributed to the BBC through their licence fees. Based on Census figures (2001), the licence fee income 2001–2002, and the number of broadcast hours in that year per language, the *Ultach* Trust response to the Ofcom review of public service broadcasting (PSB) showed the magnitude of the gap. Wales: £53 per speaker; Scotland: £64 per speaker; NI: £3 per speaker. The line of questioning pursued by Committee members at the hearing before the House of Lords Select Committee attended by two representatives from *Foras na Gaeilge*, one of whom was the head of the *Ultach* Trust, in December 2005 appeared to suggest that the difference for Irish was that it could be served from the Republic and by the proposed Broadcasting Fund, although the

view of *An Foras* was that the language community in NI was different, with a different recent history, and deserved its own perspectives to be portrayed on public service broadcasting. The main demands were a statutory recognition for Irish in the new Charter and a ringfenced proportion of the licence fee, or BBC funding, to be allocated to programming in Irish. The BBC had been arguing that it had to find such funding from resources supplied by BBC London, not BBC NI. The independent production sector argued that the BBC was taking from the independent share through the Broadcasting Fund for Irish.

Official responses during the process showed interesting variations.

The publication of the Corporation, *Building Public Value*, had a reference to its commitment to 'the UK's indigenous languages'

A submission from Ofcom in mid 2005 (Phase 3 of PSB Review) discussed broadcasting in and for Irish in the following terms: recognition of the role and future prospects of TG4 including co-operation with the BBC; request that Westminster give additional resources to the BBC to enable it to expand its Irish language programming. Ofcom reiterated this recommendation in its reply to the Government Green Paper a year later and again 'asked the Government to give it further consideration'

The Government Green and White Papers (March 2006) showed high support for, and stated commitment to, funding and development of Welsh and *Gáidhlig*. There was no specific mention of Irish in the Green Paper while the White Paper merely mentions the BBC in relation to Irish in the following terms: as having 'broadcast in Irish over the radio for nearly 25 years' and as 'currently investing in a new Language Learning Initiative for Welsh, Irish and Gaelic and a new Irish Language Broadcast Fund'; the former refers to the interactive adult teaching tool, *Colin and Cumberland*; the latter to the 25% broadcaster's input to productions with majority support from the Fund. The White Paper also reiterates sections of the Green Paper, including material from the section entitled *Representation of nations, regions and communities*. Under this section is a reference to the newly expressed representative role envisaged for the BBC, one of the five new core purposes of the BBC, one that had particular political resonances in NI: 'Provide a larger amount of dedicated programming in and for each of the devolved nations (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales); to include provision in indigenous minority languages across a range of platforms – the internet has particular value in supporting these languages'. Even if the sentiments and wording were acceptable to all sections of the NI community, it is followed, however, by references solely to Welsh and *Gáidhlig*.

It was intended to replace the BBC Board of Governors by a Trust and an Executive Board accountable to the Trust. The response of the BBC NI to the Green Paper includes the following references.

'The BBC should be encouraged to expedite its commitment to increasing the volume of Network output that is produced in its nations and regions and that its target figure of a 50% increase... should represent a baseline and not a maximum level of output/activity... programmes and services for local audiences should be adequately resourced... the Charter should provide a clearly defined and enabling context for the development of indigenous language programming by BBCNI, consistent with the BBC's existing/planned commitments to Welsh and Scots Gaelic output... the Green Paper's wording on nations' representation on the BBC Trust is ambiguous and requires urgent clarification...'

However, Irish as an indigenous Celtic language has not been recognised in the review of the BBC Charter. Supporters of Irish are not inclined either to be listed as speakers of a 'minority language' alongside Cantonese, Urdu, Hindi nor to engage in a struggle for resources with speakers of these languages. The disappointment of the voluntary and statutory agencies who had lobbied so efficiently for the inclusion of Irish in the Charter was mitigated only by the preparations already begun for the next review in 2011.

Consultation *on native languages* was scheduled for early 2007 under the BBC Viewers Council, results to go to the BBC Trust for decision. The process of an Act for Irish could influence outcomes as could the locus of decision on the Act and the content of the Act. On the one hand, broadcasting is reserved to Westminster. On the other, no more than a weak Act (if any) is expected in political commentary from a unionist dominated power sharing Executive and Assembly.

By Autumn 2007, the Council was to conduct a survey among the general public as it had

concerns in relation to the displacement of English programming by programming in Irish or Ulster-Scots. Some time later, the Trust stated that it wished to increase Irish programming and reduce the gap with the two other Celtic languages. It had expended £0.5 million overall on Irish in 2005-2006 and estimated £891,000 spend for 2007-2008. This figure meant £5.32 maximum per speaker in the calculations of the *Ultach* Trust. The BBC Trust's own comparisons of indigenous language provision (Table 8.2) is interesting for several reasons: it adds *TG4* and RTE (but not *RnaG*) broadcasting to its own hours as provision for NI viewers; in so doing, it provides output for both NI and ROI.

TG4 IN NI

Implementation of the undertaking given in the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement 1998, and reiterated in the Declaration of 2003, with regard to the extension of Irish language television services from the Republic into NI eventually took almost seven years to accomplish. The obstacles encountered were several:

- *legal negotiations in which both the EU and the UK had to give permission in this exceptional case 'to allow one country to broadcast from within another country'*
- *negotiations with the owners of rights to sports programmes or to other bought-in programmes to permit transmission in another jurisdiction without additional copyright fees*
- *deliberations on the various methods of transmission and the cost to the consumers.*

For a time, Irish speakers in NI threatened to follow the example of speakers in the south in the days before *TG4*, by refusing to pay licence fees for a service which did not provide for their needs, since *TG4* was inaccessible in many parts of NI, including areas of Belfast even after the upgrading of the Dundalk transmitter signal. A court case (June 2004) taken in the case of the Television Licensing Authority was withdrawn on a technicality. In fact, however, it was the licence fees of those in the Republic which were underpinning the extension of *TG4* into NI. At this point, it was estimated that NI coverage by *TG4* was only slightly over 50%.

All the outstanding problems received solution throughout 2005. On 2 March, at a British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, an Intergovernmental Agreement was signed giving authority to *TG4* to use a UK frequency to broadcast in NI by means of an analog transmitter from a BBC mast on Divis Mountain above Belfast. By 4 March testing on this was operational and functional by early April. Preliminary work had been underway for some months in advance, seeking planning permission and deciding on the communication company to operate the service in NI. Costs were agreed between the governments, set up costs of €130,000 and annual maintenance costs of €23,000 to be met by *Foras na Gaeilge*. There was some initial concern that the channel allocated, Channel 59, would require prospective users to buy a second aerial since this channel was not easily available on existing aerials. It was hoped that this new service would increase NI coverage of *TG4* from 54 to up to 90 per cent. It appears, however, to be still at some 70 per cent on this system.

By April 2005, *TG4* and *RTÉ1* and 2 were available on Sky satellite to digital customers in NI as they had been in the Republic since 2002. There are some 190,000 households in NI with satellite dishes. Prospective viewers did not need an additional digital system to view the stations nor was a fee applicable, as initially feared.

Copyright issues also gradually reached a satisfactory conclusion.

COMMERCIAL SECTOR

Public service broadcasting, which would include the Irish language in NI, is not confined solely to the BBC. Nevertheless, the commercial sector which also has certain obligations rarely uses Irish. It took almost fifty years of lobbying by voluntary organisations (*Comhaltas Uladh* in particular) and others, *An tIontaobhas Ultach* in later times, to persuade broadcasters to offer programmes in Irish. This began tentatively in the 1980s. The situation is still far from satisfactory, although improving, unlike the position of Welsh and *Gàidhlig*, indigenous Celtic languages for which broadcasting has been provided since the 1920s. The Broadcasting Fund is helping to change the situation.

STATUS FOR IRISH IN OTHER DOMAINS: RADIO, TELEVISION, FILM AND MULTI-MEDIA

RADIO**BBC Radio and *RnaG***

Radio Ulster began Irish language broadcasts in 1981 with one fifteen minute weekly programme. This has been extended to approximately thirty minutes five times weekly nowadays covering a range of interests and also available on the internet. Total programming for the year 2003–2004 was just over 256 hours at that time, with slight increase since. This amounted to approximately 3.4 per cent of Welsh language radio and 9.2 per cent of *Gàidhlig* radio output for the same period. An internal section serves Irish language production and training is provided in-house as normal procedure.

The Irish language radio in the south, *Raidió na Gaeltachta*, is available to NI listeners and includes them in their programming whether through interviews, events, or programmes as the previous *An Pobal Aduaidh* (The Community from the North). Other RTÉ radio stations which have some Irish programmes are similarly available.

Community Radio

Raidió Fáilte in Belfast was first heard on St. Patrick's Day 1985 as a pilot or pirate radio, possessed of no licence, rudimentary equipment, but enormous enthusiasm. It was heard intermittently over the years since then, for the *Oireachtas* festival in Belfast 1997, for example, on temporary four week licences which could be issued only twice a year, and a single one year licence, having been established on a more organised basis since 1993. In November 2004, it applied once again for a licence of longer duration, detailing the type of programming it would produce, the publics it hoped to reach and the effects generally on the community. It made an interesting argument that since Irish held such political overtones for the Protestant population, radio at home was one way they could connect with the language without any overt problems. Finally, in October 2005, a five year licence was granted by Ofcom. Funding for two posts and studios containing superior equipment was provided by *Foras na Gaeilge* and the *Ultach* Trust. The station was officially launched on 15 September 2006 to the voice of the President of Ireland. *Raidió Fáilte* is organised on the same lines as *Raidió na Life* in Dublin, using as many volunteers as possible and ensuring training for them. It also hopes to generate 20% of its income from sponsorship and advertising and intends to target the millions of people of Irish extraction in the USA through its internet broadcasting site. It broadcasts daily from 07.30 to 22.00 with repeats after that. After its first year on air, it began to seek part of the official licence fee to enable it to extend its coverage to all of NI.

The community radio which broadcasts during the annual festival in Belfast, *Raidió na Féile*, has also received a licence. However, *Raidió Fáilte* will reach only the Irish community of Belfast not of NI which still lacks an overall service. Another pilot radio, Northern Vision Radio (NVT), used to broadcast some material in Irish. Community stations in the UK which have regular programmes aimed at the Irish Diaspora will occasionally broadcast in Irish, for special events as St. Patrick's Day. The other nine commercial and five community stations in NI have no obligation to broadcast any material in Irish.

TELEVISION

Parallel with the lobbying for the inclusion of Irish-medium broadcasting in the Communications Act 2003, the BBC commissioned a report. As a result, it made two commitments: an increase in programmes and services across radio, television and on its online service; funding of research to define the needs of the NI community. This directly resulted in two new productions in 2003-2004: a four part documentary (largely in Irish) on a Gaelic Athletics Association club; a twelve part magazine programme for young people. At that stage, the BBC was to some extent in preparatory mode. There was some hope that the reviewed Royal Charter would show active commitment to Irish language programming and, of course, the BBC was aware of the possibilities to collaborate in the then proposed Broadcasting Production Fund.

In 1998, the year of the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, a high quality monthly programme, *Sneachta Dearg* (Red Snow), constituted Irish language programming on BBC NI. It is reported that, in the 2002-2003 financial year, BBC NI transmitted 3.5 hours of Irish language programming. During the financial year 2003–2004, this had increased to 8.25 hours, but fell in subsequent years. This 8.25 hours represented no more than 1.6 per cent of Welsh language output and 2.3 per cent of output in *Gàidhlig*

for the same period. During the calendar year 2004, five hours were transmitted. Between December 2004 and September 2005, very little happened except a sports broadcast on St. Patrick's Day on the BBC digital service and advertisements for the upcoming interactive learning programme, *Colin and Cumberland*. The Autumn was more prolific. The goal of the BBC in NI was to reach 10.5 hours in 2005-2006. This was assisted by the existence of *An Ciste Craoltóireachta Gaeilge* (the Irish Language Broadcasting Fund). Latest figures are given in the comparative Table 8.2, showing increase.

There is some programme collaboration between TG4 and BBC NI, which is still the largest producer of Irish language material in NI. Even before the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, TG4 (the Irish language dedicated channel in the Republic) was capable of being received by approximately 30% of the NI population. Despite the subsequent commitment in the Agreement and the joint efforts of both Governments, Dublin and Westminster, towards improving the signal to reach double the 30% pre-Agreement figure, TG4 was still not easily or widely available in NI. Indeed, good quality signal reception was far from the 65% coverage being put forward as a result of transmitter improvement and was estimated by RTE (the national broadcaster in the Republic) at closer to 54%. Further efforts continued at official level to provide NI with better quality reception, to surmount the obstacles associated with extension of copyright programmes as well as the question of EU regulation of state subvention in the media market. The case was made that exceptions from the regulations were required for a public service intended for a specific language community in order to reach 90% of the population spread. At one stage it had been hoped to broadcast TG4 programming, which did not come under bought rights, through a cable system, on a fee basis. Final resolution of all legal and technical problems was eventually reached during 2005. However, despite the new Divis Mountain transmitter in Belfast, Pobal reported that approximately 30 per cent of the population in NI were still unable to receive TG4 on terrestrial television. The other two RTE television channels, 1 and 2, which carry some Irish language programming, were available to 65% of the population in NI.

All NI Irish language programming is widely available (particularly on cable or satellite) in the Republic. The dialect will usually be Ulster Irish. S4C, Welsh Television, is available on the east coast or to satellite customers anywhere. Several *Gàidhlig* programmes are transmitted by RTE, radio and television, and by TG4.

AUDIOVISUAL AND INTERACTIVE PRODUCTION NI

In future, *An Ciste Craoltóireachta Gaeilge* of the NI Film and Television Commission will be the source of designated funding for audiovisual production. Some funding had been available from the Commission, acting for the Arts Council of NI, through monies for production and for creative ventures. However, the Commission did not have a policy in relation to Irish until its Plan for 2002–2003, and did not actively raise awareness of the existing possibilities. This apparently had resulted in few, if any, applications.

In future, there will be several calls annually for application for funding from *An Ciste*. Some of the successful applications in early 2006 included a programme for preschool children and a full length feature film. The film was made by two companies. It dealt with Connemara emigrants in London and was almost totally in Irish (with subtitles in English). It was funded from a variety of sources: the Film Commissions, North (*An Ciste*) and South, and the UK Lottery.

Three language versions of *Colin and Cumberland*, an interactive cartoon featuring a boy and his dog, have been developed by the BBC to teach Welsh, Scottish Gaelic and Irish. The Ireland Fund is donating \$1 million to the production of a special 26 episode series of the American *Sesame Street* programme for children to inculcate attitudes of respect and tolerance. It will use some Irish in the view of the NI partner in the enterprise, the NI Preschool Playgroups Association (NIPPA). Research from the University of Ulster had found sectarian attitudes in children as young as three years old. The producers of *Sesame Street* have done similar work in Kosovo, Israel, Palestine and in South Africa where they dealt with up to fourteen official languages.

The Verbal Arts Centre in Derry has Irish language material in its repertoire.

STATUS FOR IRISH IN OTHER DOMAINS: PUBLISHING

LÁ/LÁ NUA

From Belfast is published the newspaper *Lá* (Day), which developed from a 1 day to a 5 day weekly

launched on 28 April 2003 with investment from the company *Nuachtáin* (Newspapers) or the Belfast Media Group. Since January 2006, it is available on the internet also, downloadable in PDF format, and from April 2004 it was the first newspaper to engage in podcasting (instructions on www.nuacht.com). It was relaunched as *Lá Nua* on 17 January 2007. The paper is financed in several ways to ensure continuous production, but largely through official subvention from *Foras na Gaeilge* and through the EU Programme INTERREG (IIIA ROI/NI); shares (some bought in America); subscriptions; advertising; small grant from the NI Arts Council (Arts column). It has offices in Belfast and opened an office in mid 2004 in the Donegal *Gaeltacht*. It is now published in tabloid format, having changed from broadsheet.

The first edition of *Lá* appeared on Monday, 13 August 1984, having been planned the previous weekend by a group of young people with education and skills but no employment who were growing up in the shadow of the NI Troubles but also in the glow of hope engendered by the many Irish-language initiatives centred on the Shaw's Road community of Belfast. It cost 10 old pence and contained 4 pages on two sheets stapled together. So great was the demand in Dublin that an extra 1,000 copies of that historic first edition, and the news it contained of Belfast, had to be printed on the 14 August. While the name *INNUI* had been considered, to continue the tradition of the 1940s paper, *Lá* was chosen, the name proposed by *Séamas Mac Seáin*, the manager of the Anderstown News and supporter of the project. In 1999 the Anderstown News acquired the newspaper itself. The theatre company, *Aisling Ghéar*, produced a video to celebrate the 20 years of development in August 2004. As a not-for-profit venture, the newspaper is controlled by the company *Preas an Phobail* (the People's Press). The community shares are held by members of the Irish community and by the Anderstown Newsgroup (Belfast Media Group), which also provided accountancy and office services in the lean years. With the latest two year contract from *Foras na Gaeilge* assured, *Lá* has been relaunched as *Lá Nua* (New Day) on 17 January 2007, still available online with entries on the video site YouTube and via podcasting.

On 10 May 2006, *Lá* published a front page article on a news item prominent at that time, the use of Shannon Airport by what were alleged to be 'CIA flights'. On 18 May, a full page was devoted to the very full reply, in Irish, from the US Ambassador to Ireland.

The estimated distribution of *Lá*, including discounted copies, is approximately as follows and remains fairly consistent:

***Lá/La Nua*, 4,500 copies daily.**

Some political developments in the past two years have seen arguments made by Ulster Unionist politicians in the Westminster House of Commons and House of Lords against funding for *Lá*. Efforts were intended to try to have the funding of *Lá* removed on the basis that the public subventions given to *Lá* are not appropriate and should be discontinued. Discrimination was one argument used. Shortly afterwards, the funding from the EU INTERREG programme was suspended by the UK Government. It was intended to support the cross-border Donegal office of *Lá* in a local *Gaeltacht* community facility, *An Chrannóg*, through the EU funding. Two posts in the newspaper were temporarily lost and it appeared likely that the Friday edition would have to go. Further EU auditing took place. *An Foras* extended the *Lá* contract for a further six months, the affair was eventually solved, and the Minister with responsibility for the language in the Republic officially opened the Donegal *Gaeltacht* office.

Since *An Foras Teanga* is jointly funded by the two Governments, Dublin and through the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure in NI, defence of *Lá* was made in the *Dáil*. *Lá* began a petition for its survival which succeeded. The political context is further complicated, or clarified, by the legislative context of the Charter of the Council of Europe, a Charter which, while encouraging the production of newspapers for linguistic communities, has been differentially accepted by the UK authorities for Irish and Ulster-Scots, applied in cultural terms only for Ulster-Scots.

The Arts Council of NI subvents a weekly insert on the Arts in *Lá Nua*. The Irish-language newspaper covers the full spectrum from politics to sport to the arts and business not forgetting human interest, but with emphasis on issues relating to the language and the *Gaeltacht* also. St. Valentine's Day draws a page of messages in Irish in *Lá*.

Funding for *Lá* from *Foras na Gaeilge* for 2006 was £191,337 or €277,300. However, continued publication is considered under threat (2007/8) for several reasons, including decrease in official advertising income.

The Belfast based English language newspaper, the Irish News, publishes material in Irish also. It had plans to expand this production either through an insert or an independent new paper.

AN tULTACH

The magazine, *An tUltach*, has been published since 1924 by the organisation *Comhaltas Uladh*. It covers literary and other material, largely of Ulster interest. It is now funded by *Foras na Gaeilge*. The grant for 2006 was £24,000 or €34,780. Much voluntary work goes into production of all Irish language print materials.

AWARDS

Awards are given to individuals active in the field of Irish-language promotion who are (s)electd by readers, *Gradam na hAislinge* (Award/Distinction of the Vision), through the Belfast Media Group. These are advertised and promoted through *Lá* which also supports creative writing in Irish.

BOOKSHOPS AND LIBRARIES

The cultural centre, *An Chultúrlann*, in Belfast includes a bookshop and café as does the *Gaeláras* in Derry. These are run almost entirely through Irish. General outlets in some areas in the vicinity of Irish-medium schools or activities may carry some books in Irish.

In NI, much preparatory work has been accomplished by *Foras na Gaeilge* in collaboration with the Library Boards across a range of initiatives: Irish books stock including learning materials; policy for community languages; welcoming signage; reading visits arranged for local Irish-medium schools. This may be facilitated by existing Irish-speaking staff.

There are several contemporary writers based in Belfast and Irish-language publishing has close connections in an all-Ireland context. In both jurisdictions, there are ‘writer-in-residence’ schemes for third level.

ADVERTISING

In NI, the spirit of the European Charter will apply to advertising. This has meant that some NI departments did advertise in Irish in Irish-language media although the practice seemed to depend largely on the minister in question. The possible effects of the 2003 Official Languages Act in the Republic were reported in the Business pages of the Irish Times (24 June 2004) as meaning an increase in advertising space and consequently in revenue for Irish language newspapers in particular. As a result the newspaper, *Lá*, was reported in the English press in the Republic as having appointed a company for its advertising sales, which come both from the Republic and NI. However, the umbrella organisation, *Pobal*, reports that only some £20,000 went to *Lá* of the £17.2 million advertising spend by the NI Government. The 2005 Review of Government Advertising in NI made no reference to Irish. State and public sector advertising in NI is worth up to £18 million sterling (over €26 million) annually. An English language newspaper, Daily Ireland, attributed its failure in 2006 to being refused public advertising. A review was instigated, a public procurement system resulted and contracts secured by some newspapers. However, the system was not yet considered appropriate, contracts were suspended and a new review was set up. It was considered likely (April 2007) that the new Executive may bring in new guidelines which may benefit the Irish language paper, *Lá Nua*. However, while it was understood that no change would take place pending the outcome of this review, the Minister for Health recently cancelled the automatic issue of press releases and advertisements in Irish and Ulster-Scots, as detailed above. [In May 2008, the Minister for Regional Development was devising a language scheme in his department which encompassed advertising in Irish in Irish media; identifying staff able to deal with the public through Irish; and establishing a system of translation to ensure that more departmental documents and forms were made available to the public in Irish and that users could access the website more easily.](#)

STATUS FOR IRISH IN OTHER DOMAINS: CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

THEATRE

A semi-professional theatre group, *Aisling Ghéar*, functions on a regular basis with funding from the Northern Ireland Arts Council and from *Foras na Gaeilge*. It sometimes translates plays to Irish. It also,

on occasion, provides simultaneous translation at performances. It tours North and South when funding is available. *Ababú* is another new children's theatre venture in NI.

A joint report on Irish-language theatre and drama was commissioned by the Arts Councils of the Republic and NI. In the Republic, drama now comes under the heading 'Literature in the Irish language' in the Arts Council's latest strategy. The joint report on drama had initially been commissioned by the two Arts Councils, North and South, the North-South implementation body *Foras na Gaeilge*, and the Belfast-based *Ultach* Trust. Since the report is now several years old, changes have taken place. A consultation process on drama in Irish scheduled for Autumn 2004 was undertaken by *Pobal*. The results were provided to the NI Council as input into developing policies.

MUSIC

NI possesses its own fine local exponents of both traditional and contemporary music through Irish. A roadshow, organised by *Pobal*, and jointly funded by several local authorities and the Arts Council, tours the North regularly.

EXHIBITIONS/MUSEUMS/HERITAGE CENTRES/FESTIVALS

Foras na Gaeilge and *Iontaobhas Ultach*, have over the years ensured that exhibitions on community languages have been mounted and policies for Irish developed in museums and heritage centres in NI particularly through the official umbrella body MAGNI (museums, arts, galleries). Collaboration may occur between heritage bodies North and South.

For Irish speakers and schools, science events through Irish have been held in Armagh Planetarium and an Irish translation was made of the video on *Eamhain Macha* in the heritage centre, Navan Fort. As part of its language diversity programme and with the assistance of *Foras na Gaeilge*, Down County Museum has installed an Irish language version, via earphones, of its information for visitors on the artifacts displayed.

The Linenhall Library in Belfast, in collaboration with *Iontaobhas*, has hosted regular events, exhibitions and lectures. The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum has valuable archive material in its library and has engaged on research on the Ulster Dialect Archive which contains, *inter alia*, information on loan words from Irish. The Public Records Office also holds some materials in Irish. [The Central Library in Belfast mounted an exhibition \(to run into 2008\) on Francis Joseph Bigger \(1863 – 1926\), the Presbyterian nationalist, who had an unbounded interest in all aspects of Irish culture, who helped set up the Glens Feis \(Festival, Gathering\) and was a member of *Conradh na Gaeilge*.](#)

A comprehensive exhibition on the Irish language in Belfast from the ninth century to the present day was opened in Belfast's City Hall in October 2006 as part of the City Hall's 100th anniversary celebrations. The exhibition, mounted on ten panels and accompanied by an attractive booklet, was sponsored by *Foras na Gaeilge*. The attendance included government and civil service representatives from NI and from Dublin, as well as the voluntary sector. It was opened in Irish by the DUP (Democratic Unionist Party) Deputy Mayoress. Music was provided by the Irish traditional singer-in-residence at Queen's University.

Several of these cultural institutions have existing staff with skills in Irish. Others are being supported by *Foras na Gaeilge* to provide basic facilities. All are encouraged to have policy statements on use of Irish in contact with the public.

Local community events or festivals *Fleadh Cheoil Ard Eoin* or *Féile an Lóiste* are a frequent feature, usually organised by the local voluntary society for Irish or an aspect of Irish culture. The longest running is the bilingual *Féile an Phobail* in Belfast, almost twenty years in operation and economically of great benefit to the local community. Its funding is not guaranteed from year to year which creates some uncertainty and re-organisation but has not yet halted the *Féile*. In 2007, the grant of £100,000 was first withdrawn and then reinstated.

Expenditure on all these aspects of cultural community life is generally considered a good investment in the context of the communities' difficult recent history and the retrenchment of social life this history entailed for individuals.

THE ARTS

Legislation

While the Arts Council of NI had traditionally given some level of support to the arts of Irish, that became more structured with the political arrangements following on the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement and, in the legislative context, in compliance with the implementation of agreed Articles of the Charter of the Council of Europe.

With regard to one relevant section of the Charter of the Council of Europe, (*Authorities' cultural policy abroad*), the Committee of Experts looking at implementation in their First Report stated their opinion that this requirement was considered fulfilled, through the Arts Councils of NI, Ireland, and the British Council's travel awards and international residency schemes, although the view was also expressed that full information was lacking.

The Arts Council NI and Arts in Irish: Composition and staff

Three members were appointed to the NI Arts Council in July 2003, one of them a NI member of *Foras na Gaeilge*.

The first Language Arts (to include Irish) Officer of the Arts Council NI was appointed in 2003. In January 2007, it was announced that a dedicated post was being created for the development of the language arts in NI entitled Language Officer, on a three year contract, to be co-funded by the Arts Council, *Foras na Gaeilge* and the Ulster-Scots Agency.

In 2003, the Irish language community argued that, despite the then appointment of a Language Arts Officer and despite the significant increase in Council funding, no more than 3% of the total was being spent on the Irish language arts, £226,000 of the £7.1m announced for distribution at that time over 129 groups, although 10% of the population professed some knowledge of the language. This represented less than £4.50 per capita. Figures in Table 8.3 show the level of recent and current expenditure.

Planning for the Arts

Two reports were commissioned by the Council during 2003: one on the arts through Irish and Ulster-Scots; the other on drama in Irish, in collaboration with the Arts Council in the South.

The Final Report on the Arts of Irish and Ulster-Scots arose from an audit and needs analysis conducted among the communities and organisations, focusing on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and attempting to list priorities. Comparison with other cultural agencies outside NI is also made, as diverse as Quebec, Catalonia, the Saami people of Scandinavia. The recommendations for consultation, to shape future policy, are extensive. In the case of Irish, the general recommendations comprise education (particularly the Irish-medium sector), training for cultural workers, broad communications policy and more sustained use of the media. Specific recommendations are then made for development of creative writing, for drama, and for the traditional arts, singing in particular. Respect for cultural diversity is the main principle guiding this commissioned research in which *Foras na Gaeilge* and the *Ultach* Trust had an initial consultative role.

Consultation

Public meetings were organised by *Pobal* in Belfast, Newry and Derry, to ensure consultation and a response to this report from the Irish arts community. The main grievances identified were three: lack of funding, status and recognition for Irish arts. Several recommendations were made to the board of the Arts Council arising out of the continuing consultation process: that for Irish arts there should be a specific stand alone fund, a specific Irish arts officer (not just languages officer), and that formal consultation with Irish language arts groups and interests should be ongoing. In other words, a developmental strategic action plan with an accompanying ringfenced budget.

Funding for the Arts in Irish

The Northern Ireland Arts Council supports many initiatives in music, writing, drama, and events in Irish or in bilingual format and may collaborate with the Arts Council in Dublin. It has supported a writer/traditional singer-in-residence and literary readings in Irish in a variety of settings. Some groups and organisations are funded on a yearly basis. Events, which may change from year to year, are funded when sanctioned. The tables show the type of initiatives funded and the amount of funding disbursed.

Policy decisions may differ from one year to another. *Féile an Phobail*, the long running community festival in Belfast and the activities of *An Droichead* in Belfast are some examples of initiatives for which funding fluctuates. The Council also funds music, piping and aspects of shared heritage.

Expenditure for arts-related events in the Irish language during 2003–2004 included the following, from information supplied by the Arts Council, Table 8.3 (a). This outlay of almost £349,000 compares with expenditure of £138,700 for the year 1998–1999. The Arts Council is an associated agency of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) which provided the information in Table 8.3 (b).

Colmcille is the agency to develop links between Irish and Scottish Gaelic, funded by government in Dublin, Belfast and Edinburgh with a development officer in each jurisdiction. The two items under Policy Branch (in the table) have been included on the basis that they represent specific actions on aspects of culture in Irish, although the Broadcasting Fund is financed by the British Government. In recent funding lists published by the Arts Council, individual artists appear whose names are in Irish and also the following items which may include Irish or bilingual aspects.

<i>Féile an Phobail</i> (annual Community Festival, Belfast)	£ Sterling	35,000
CLÉ (Book Publishers Association)		9,174
RIA (Royal Irish Academy, Dublin)		4,500
Verbal Arts Centre (Derry)		38,511

The growing variety of initiatives and events is one indication of the continuing involvement of the NI Arts Council with Irish language arts. The increasing funding over the years is another. The recent appointment of a dedicated staff member should hopefully see more development.

NI Arts Council Funding for Irish language Arts 1998–1999 to 2005–2006

Year	£ Sterling	Euro	Source
1998–1999	138,000	205,620	NI Arts Council
2003–2004	348,973	519,970	DCAL
2004–2005	498,672	743,021	DCAL
2005–2006	627,410	934,841	Column Tuarascáil Irish Times

IRISH IN OTHER DOMAINS OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL LIFE

RELIGION

While Irish in NI tends to be associated nowadays in a stereotypical way with nationalism and Catholicism, there are, of course, some Irish speakers in all the Protestant churches, as reported in the censuses of 1996 and 2001. The number with some knowledge of Irish increased from 3,922 in 1991 to 7,388 in 2001. There are Irish speakers in the Orange Order, some of them clergymen. Making a choice of raising a family through Irish has been taken by members of all the churches. One of the most prolific writers in Irish on ecclesiastical matters and figures of importance, who has recently died, was a Southern Methodist, *Risteard Ó Glaisne*.

Research published in May 2005 by the *Ultach* Trust shows that an uneasy relationship still exists in a divided NI between the Irish language and members of the Protestant churches. For those who would wish to learn or better their ability in the language, members have difficulty not alone sourcing Irish classes in areas other than nationalist but in contending with the attitudes towards them of both communities and with fears at times about their own personal safety. This clash between political and cultural viewpoints, the clash between recognition and ownership of aspects of the language and culture and long held political loyalties and attitudes, these are easier dealt with by Protestants in language learning environments such as those available in Donegal, where they are not so clearly juxtaposed, or through radio and television programmes in the home.

To balance this current politically sourced situation, there are several histories available of members of all the Protestant churches in NI and their contribution to Irish language and culture. *Cultúrlann McAdam-Ó Fiaich* on the Falls Road in Belfast commemorates one of them.

In NI it had been solely Catholic-run education which offered Irish as a school subject until the more recent integrated schools were established.

All the churches in NI are trustees of the Churches Peace Education Programme: Catholic, Protestant churches, Orthodox. A report on the operation of the programme 1978–2004 was

prepared with research from the two denominational teacher education institutions, St. Mary's and Stranmillis. While advocating the continued involvement of the churches, even as an obligation, in peace education, the deep identity crisis still pertaining in NI was also revealed and how the conflict about identity is still very potent. Most commentators point out the connections between identity and linguistic matters.

SPORT

Cumann Lúthchleas Gael (Gaelic Athletic Association – GAA)

In sport, regard for Irish was for long almost exclusively relegated to *Cumann Lúthchleas Gael* (Gaelic Athletic Association), founded on the 1 November 1884 initially to promote all indigenous Gaelic games: hurling and camogie, Gaelic football, handball, rounders. The Basic Aim (sic) of the Association is set out in section 2, version 2007, of the Official Guide:

The Association is a National Organisation which has as its basic aim the strengthening of the National Identity (sic) in a 32 County Ireland through the preservation and promotion of Gaelic Games and pastimes.

Item 4 of the Association's Official Guide states clearly its additional cultural aims:

The Association shall actively support the Irish language, traditional Irish dancing, music, song and other aspects of Irish culture. It shall foster an awareness and love of the national ideals in the people of Ireland, and assist in promoting a community spirit through its clubs.

Item 7 professes the non-party political and non-sectarian nature of the association.

The Gaelic Athletic Association allies itself unambiguously with the concept of 'nation'; it is 'a means of consolidating our national identity', in the words of the introduction to the Official Guide (2007).

It continues:

Since she has no control over all the national territory, Ireland's claim to nationhood is impaired. It would be still more impaired if she were to lose her language, if she failed to provide a decent livelihood for her people at home, or if she were to forsake her own games and customs in favour of the games and customs of another nation. If pride in the attributes of nationhood dies, something good and distinctive in our race dies with it.'

As a 32 county association, *Cumann Lúthchleas Gael* (Gaelic Athletic Association) functions also in NI. In the context of that jurisdiction, the association's national and cultural philosophy had led to politically based problems for both players and club premises, despite the fact that members of religions other than RC were represented at all levels, (although mainly in the Republic) and that the association's aims are national not religious.

Item 8 of the 2007 Guide states that the 'Rules of the Association shall be printed in Irish and in English, and in the event of conflict the Irish version shall prevail'. The Irish flag (National Flag) is flown at GAA matches according to Rule 15 of the association and the National Anthem is played at significant matches irrespective of where held; clubs 'shall not be named after a living person or any existing political or semi-political organisation' and 'must bear a name in the Irish language, which must be used in all correspondence and official documents, otherwise these documents shall be ruled out of order' (Rule 25); affiliation forms allow for the English-language version also. The Belfast grounds are called after Sir Roger Casement. Rule 10 lays down that certain parts of official documents and correspondence shall be in Irish. Lists of full members (and of youth members) shall be submitted annually to the County Secretary in Irish (Rule 18) and like wise in the case of club players at all levels (Rule 19). The Club Manual (2005) contains a section on *Gaeilge ag an gCruinniú* (Irish at meetings) giving a list of appropriate forms of address and useful phrases as well as a section detailing the duties of the Culture and Language Officer to be filled 'by someone who has a working knowledge of *Gaeilge* (sic). The manual advises that 'Tact and perseverance are vital attributes for success in this position'. The club constitution is available in Irish. The GAA Millenium Plan for the Irish Language 'encourages the acquisition and use of Irish as opposed to knowledge of the language alone. The aim is that increased Irish language usage among members of the GAA who speak the language will result in an increased usage among its supporters'. A very useful Irish Terms Book helps towards this objective.

The relaxation of certain longstanding rules of the association has led to a new situation since 2000. Membership *now shall be open to the community as a whole, without discrimination* under regulations issued to clubs in the Six Counties and Great Britain by the Central Council of the association on 9 December 2006, as written in the latest edition of the *Official Guide – Part I* of January 2007. Until the establishment of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Rule 21 had imposed a ban on membership by those in the British Army or in the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). The former Rule 42 (requiring GAA premises to be available for use solely by the GAA) led to much debate at the annual congresses of 2004 and 2005. At the latter the temporary use of Croke Park, the major GAA stadium in Dublin, was allowed to the FAI and to the Irish Rugby Football Union for their international fixtures. This appears as a note to Rule 44 in the latest Guide (2007). Over thirty years before, in the early 1970s, the rule forbidding members to play *foreign games* had been repealed. [The current Rules 42 and 44 of the 2007 Guide state as follows.](#)

42 Non-Affiliated Bodies

(a) A member or any unit of the Association shall not participate in games of Gaelic Football, Hurling or Handball promoted by a body not affiliated to Central Council, without the prior sanction of Central Council.

44 Uses of Property

(a) All property including grounds... shall be used only for the purpose of or in connection with the playing of the Games controlled by the Association, and for such other purposes not in conflict with the Aims and Objectives of the Association, that may be sanctioned from time to time by the Central Council.

(b) Grounds controlled by the Association units shall not be used or permitted to be used, for Horse Racing, Greyhound Racing, or for Field Games other than those sanctioned by Central Council.

(Note: Central Council shall have the power to authorize the use of Croke Park for games, other than those controlled by the Association, during a temporary period when Lansdowne Road Football Ground is closed for the proposed development. Congress has approved that Rules... shall allow for this for a temporary period, at the end of which all these Rules stated shall revert to their pre-Congress 2005 position.)

Comórtas Peile na Gaeltachta (Gaeltacht Football Championship) is a high profile and very popular competition, the final of which is screened live on *TG4*. Played out over the long Bank Holiday weekend in June, it is now accompanied by a host of other events. [This championship began in 1986 when two student friends at University College Dublin brought together their respective Gaeltacht teams from opposite ends of Ireland, Gaoth Dobhair \(Gweedore\) in Donegal and Baile an Fheirtéaraigh \(Ballyferriter\) in Kerry.](#) Agreement was reached (early 2007) that Irish-speaking teams from Belfast may participate since they form part of an Irish-speaking sector of the city, *Ceathrú Gaeltachta* (Gaeltacht Quarter) unlike the dispersed regional background of the other two teams (Mayo and Dublin) seeking participation.

POLITICAL PARTIES

In Northern Ireland, overt positive policy in relation to Irish appears confined to the nationalist parties, to *Sinn Féin*, which until recently was the only party with representation both North and South, and to the SDLP (Social Democratic Labour Party). The most recent policy document of the SDLP (2006) had a significant section on Irish in education. The Alliance Party will generally demonstrate an understanding of the historic significance of Irish. The unionist parties, however, have shown a slightly more accepting attitude to the language in recent times, particularly at district council level in some areas, although in January 2006 City Hall, Belfast, confirmed that there would be no school tours of City Hall through Irish for Irish-medium schools and the DUP Lord Mayor's invitation to schools was issued in English only.

In May 2006, the executive body of *Sinn Féin*, *An Ard-Chomhairle*, adopted a policy to advance the use of Irish within all sections of the party so that all internal and external matters would be in Irish by the centenary of the Easter Rising in 2016. The approach is said to be modelled on that of the Basque *Batasuna* party which replaced the use of Spanish by use of the Basque language within that party.

The Irish language was derided by a unionist member in the Westminster Parliament in late November 2006. The party's Member of the European Parliament regularly opposed any motion related to Irish. Local authorities debating motions on bilingual signage or other language related matters generally encounter opposition from loyalist members. Assembly debate in recent times has revealed entrenched attitudes on the part of some members. However, this may be at base political rather than linguistic conflict since the opposite is also true. The DUP Deputy Mayor of Belfast welcomed guests in Irish and participated fully in an event in City Hall in October 2006 celebrating Irish in the city over the centuries.

Towards the end of 2007, *Fianna Fáil*, the largest party in the Republic, officially registered as a political party in NI. It currently has two *cumann* (the term used by the party for local branch) in Queen's University, Belfast, and in the Derry campus of the University of Ulster.

NATIONAL/CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS AND CENTRES

The language is still found largely within the nationalist population and it is within this population that the major cultural centres are found: in West Belfast, North Belfast, Derry and South Armagh. The Irish-speaking community of West Belfast estimates itself at 30% of the local population. Many activities, e.g. cafe, bookshop, weekly newspaper *Lá*, theatre, master classes in the traditional arts, training for *Raidió Fáilte*, take place at *Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich*, the cultural and tourist information centre part-funded by the NI Arts Council and *Foras na Gaeilge*. This was founded in 1991 and is housed in a former Presbyterian church. It is dedicated to two icons of Irish, and particularly Northern, cultural history: Robert McAdam, a Presbyterian businessman who was a central figure in the revival of Irish in Belfast of the nineteenth century; Cardinal *Tomás Ó Fiaich*, an European historian and Irish scholar of the twentieth century who, from his residence in Armagh, was much involved behind the scenes in matters ecclesiastical and political that preceded the Good Friday Agreement. *The Gaeláras* in Derry functions in a similar way. It is of note that these enterprises have economic as well as community and cultural benefits. *Tí Chulainn* in County Armagh was established as a residential community resource. It functions bilingually. There are local community language projects also running in the Glens of Antrim, Dunloy, Downpatrick, Coalisland, and Strabane.

Probably the oldest cultural centre in Belfast is *Cumann Chluain Ard* (Clonard Association) which in December 2004 received £75,000 funding for refurbishment from *Foras na Gaeilge*. It considers itself the only socialist Irish language club in Ireland. Founded in 1936, nobody is turned away if they do not have the small fees for classes. A bag is passed round and individuals put in according to their means. Its history has meant that most shades of nationalist political leanings have sat together there to learn and to follow the sole rule of speaking only in Irish.

LOCAL GROUPS

In NI then, there are quite good cultural facilities, particularly for the surrounding population, some under further development: *Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich* in Belfast; *An Gaeláras* in Derry; *Cultúrlann an Iúir* in Newry. Other ventures across locations in NI include local associations (*cumann*) and groups as *Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain*, *Cumann Gaelach Cnoc na Rós*, *Cumann Gaelach Leath Chathail*, *Pobal* (community) *Mhuileann an tSiáin*, *Coiste Forbartha* (development committee) *Charn Tóchair*, *Doire le Dúchas* (heritage; heredity; nativeness), *An Droichead* (bridge), and the recently opened *Bia Beatha* (Food Nourishment/Life) restaurant in the former *Glór na nGael* premises in West Belfast.

Most are funded by *Foras na Gaeilge*, whether through specific activities or funding for Development Officers. Unusually, the *Derry Gaeláras* is to receive capital funding of £600,000 sterling over two years 2006–2007 for a cultural centre to serve the local community.

The national organisations, *Comhaltas* and *Cumann Lúthchleas Gael*, are all-island entities. So too are several of the Irish voluntary organisations around which committees and groups may form such as those associated with *Glór na nGael*.

ECONOMIC LIFE

LEGISLATION

The only legislation relevant to the Irish language in economic life in NI are the various references in the Charter of the Council of Europe.

The level of unemployment in NI in April 2006 was reported at 4.6 per cent, lower than the UK average of 5.1 per cent and the EU much higher average of 8.5 per cent. It has since decreased further. Unemployment is highest in the 18 to 24 age group at 8.3 per cent but NI has one of the youngest populations in the UK. Employment is heavily dependent on the public sector. Business life in NI remains, however, dependent on a stable political situation. Consequently, the business sector endeavours to highlight the benefits of such stability as well as the advantages of co-operation between the Republic and NI (e.g. energy, food) and of the existence of cross-border implementation bodies.

All these factors influence the efforts in the economic sphere of Irish language activists and organisations.

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES AND FUNDING

In Northern Ireland, the situation approximates to that of the Republic but with some important differences. In NI many of the adult language learning initiatives are linked directly to job creation and employment opportunities through Irish for learners. In addition, local enterprise initiatives and the language are linked to community development in ways found more usually in the *Gaeltacht* in the Republic. Main subventions may come from official sources directed at enterprise rather than language. This is true particularly of developments in Belfast and Derry. Language, employment, arts, all come together in an integrated fashion, in the interests of the local community. This approach is probably more feasible in the fairly tightly knit and clearly local nationalist communities of NI.

Under this rubric may be counted *Forbairt Feirste*, (Development of *Fearsaid* – nominative case, *Béal Feirste* genitive case, being the original Irish name for the anglicised ‘Belfast’), which was set up in 1994. It helps start-up businesses through Irish and organises conferences on the economic value of culture and language. It operated from a building entitled *An Nasc* (the link) which also housed *Telelann*, a company offering a range of multimedia and information technology services in both languages, including simultaneous translation (interpreters and equipment). A cross-border programme for innovators has been organised in 2006 with funding from the EU INTERREG programme and the *Gaeltacht* Authority, managed by *Forbairt Feirste* in Belfast and *Oideas Gael* in Donegal.

Serving the community in east and south Belfast, the enterprise *An Droichead* (The Bridge) integrates education, the arts, and the social economy under the motto ‘Building Sustainable Prosperity’ on the one hand and ‘Working Together on behalf of Irish’ on the other.

Restaurants such as *An Caife Glas*, *An Cúpla Focal*, and *An Caife Gaelach* (The Green Cafe, The Few Words, The Gaelic Cafe) are other fairly recent ventures.

AN GAELÁRAS, DOIRE CHOLMCILLE

The Derry *Gaeláras* is in receipt of capital funding of £600,000 sterling from *Foras na Gaeilge* over two years 2006-2007 for a cultural centre to serve the local community. Derry is recognised as an unemployment blackspot. The existing facility had successfully provided training and services through Irish over a range of activities, including even a bakery.

CEATHRÚ GAELTACHTA (GAELTACHT QUARTER), BELFAST

The Belfast development groups found that they had to remind the NI Tourist Board (NITB) that the tourism strategic plan launched for consultation in 2006 was lacking in that which constituted Irish language cultural tourism. It was also a disappointment that of £22 million then earmarked for the development of cultural centres in Belfast, West Belfast and the proposed *Gaeltacht* Quarter, with its economic possibilities, were initially omitted. The *Gaeltacht* Quarter would be particularly viable, in view of the many facilities locally available through Irish. They include two preschool facilities, two primary schools, a postprimary school, as well as teacher training and provision of materials at St. Mary’s University College and the trust which funds Irish-medium education, *Iontaobhas Gaelscolaíochta*. The *Cultúrlann* itself houses the bookshop, *An Ceathrú Póilí*, a restaurant, a theatre, an art gallery, a tourist office, the activities of a theatre group, a film production group and the umbrella organisation *Pobal*. It now incorporates the studio purpose built for the licensed community radio, *Raidió Fáilte*. The offices of *Forbairt Feirste* are close by and the centre *Ionad Uíbh Eachach*.

Arising from the community development and employment work of the group *Forbairt Feirste*, a report prepared by an expert on urban regeneration was published in December 2004. This report

fully supported the concept of a *Gaeltacht* Quarter and recommended, *inter alia*, the establishment of a steering group representative of State and voluntary interests. By the end of 2005, two events took place. The responsible department, DCAL, had its own independent report prepared which also recommended a representative group as the previous report had done. *Forbairt Feirste* began to lose patience, however, when the new official development plan for Belfast city, with significant funding from the British Exchequer, contained reference to a Titanic Quarter but no mention of the *Gaeltacht* Quarter nor of any funding for such a development in West Belfast.

At a dinner in August 2006 to celebrate *Forbairt Feirste* and local enterprise, an architect was chosen to speak on his own well known work on regeneration projects. Eventually, the idea of a *Gaeltacht* Quarter was officially accepted. In September 2006, Belfast City Council and its Tourism Subcommittee added the *Gaeltacht* Quarter to the three other Quarters, (Titanic, University and Cathedral) and issued a map of the *Gaeltacht* Quarter, as recognition for the development of the area, and of the language as part of the overall regeneration process, not necessarily of the Irish language *per se*. An economic review of revitalisation had been undertaken by the interim board of the project leading to recommendations on an expanded role for the *Cultúrlann* and the establishment of a limited company to market the Quarter. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) in NI pledged £1 million towards the project, having reviewed the plan and architectural report. An inclusive advisory group encompassing all significant partners in the area designated as Quarter was envisaged. By the end of October 2006, three posts were advertised for the new company: chief executive, marketing and development manager, administrator. By December, architects had been retained and plans drawn for a greatly enhanced *Cultúrlann* to be the centrepiece of *An Cheathrú Gaeltachta*.

EMPLOYMENT AND ADVERTISING

In both jurisdictions, language activity is itself a source of employment, whether in State initiated bodies, in education, in the voluntary sector, in the arts, or in local enterprises to promote and support the language in community based initiatives. Language or development or project officers are now common, in health services, in local authorities, in education, in national organisations. Some may also be responsible for marketing and research. Adult language classes are another area of lively activity, even if some are subsidised.

The job advertisements in any of the Irish language media, North and South, will generally reflect this range of employment, including the media themselves, as well as public bodies. An answer to a parliamentary question recently (June 2004) raised in Westminster showed that the Department of the Environment in NI expended over €170,000 over three years on advertising in Irish without receiving any applications in Irish. Since such official advertising is a very new phenomenon in NI, it was not clear whether the lack of response through Irish was due to applicants not having seen the Irish version or having some misgivings with regard to the ability of the Department to process applications in Irish or lack of interest on the part of Irish speakers in the posts being advertised. Job applicants rarely leave themselves at a possible perceived disadvantage. A survey of successful applicants might perhaps further clarify the parliamentary answer provided. The process of translation itself, however, generated both economic, linguistic, and educational benefits.

AWARDS

The Belfast Media Group recognises cross-border initiatives of various kinds, including those associated with Irish language, through *Gradaim* (Awards) and *Barr-Ghnó*.

Annual awards of recognition for entrepreneurs who use Irish in their field are assisted by the newspaper *Lá Nua*, with sponsorship from *Foras na Gaeilge* and the all-Ireland energy firm Viridian, which issued a bilingual diary for 2006. Support is also provided by RTÉ, National Lottery and the Marketing Institute. The scheme is entitled *Barr-Chaoga Gnó le Gaeilge*, Top 50 Business *as Gaeilge*, a reasonable indication of the developing trend. As befits business, the awards ceremony takes place in a prominent venue and tickets are sold out fairly quickly. The nominated companies for 2006 ranged across the entire business sector North and South. Prizes were presented by the Minister for Finance at a lunch in Dublin. The President of Ireland presented the awards for 2007.

The annual media awards of *Oireachtas na Gaeilge* are open to all media, print and electronic, on an all-island basis. Radio, the newspaper *Lá* and books from NI have all been beneficiaries.

THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

ORGANISATIONS AND ACTIVITY

Community and Education

- Both *Comhaltas Uladh* of *Conradh na Gaeilge* and *Conradh na Gaeilge* itself have branches in NI.
- *Iontaobhas Ultach* (1989) is the cross-community Trust for advocacy and disbursement of some funding.
- *Glór na nGael* (competition) has many local committees.

Education

- *Altram* (Fosterage) (1996) – provision of training and materials for pre-school.
- *Gaeloiliúint* (1991) – post postprimary courses, currently in abeyance, subsumed into *An Bradán Feasa* (Salmon of Knowledge) – research-based activities.
- *Iontaobhas Ultach* (1989) – specific cross-community educational initiatives.

Forum

- *Pobal* (1998) – for voluntary and community organisations.

Drama and the Arts

- *Aisling Ghéar* 1995 (literally *bitter dream*)
- *Ababú* 2006 (children's theatre initially)
- *Bláthanna* (literally *flowers*) Arts

New community and educational initiatives are constantly coming into being all over NI.

THE CONCEPTS OF URBAN AND VIRTUAL GAELTACHT

The *Gaeltacht* constitutes the sole regions where Irish is still community language. Outside those regions, in the rest of the country, Irish speakers are found in dispersed networks rather than territorially based. Over the years, this has led to plans for setting up housing schemes for Irish speakers, a *Baile Gaelach* (Irish town) as one plan described it. This use of the term is, in fact, ironic, since Irishtown was used in the past to describe parts of cities or towns, usually the poorer areas, to which the native Irish speakers had retreated or were concentrated.

Shaw's Road in West Belfast is probably the best known and most enduring of these planned schemes of a new age, to the point where local development is at a stage where *Gaeltacht* status as a *Gaeltacht* Quarter was seriously sought, and has now been seriously considered and accepted by the relevant authorities in NI, on criteria of social regeneration and potential for tourism, by end 2006.

There had been a similar plan in Altmore, County Tyrone, where a site of over 50 acres had been earmarked to provide 20 homes and an education cum culture centre. Joint funding of £1.8m sterling was being sought to develop the site from the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Community, Rural and *Gaeltacht* Affairs in the Republic. This plan did not reach fruition.

With the decline in the *fíor-Ghaeltacht* (true *Gaeltacht* – heartland) and rise in fluent second language speakers outwith the *Gaeltacht*, two viewpoints are emerging: the need for integrated language planning demonstrated in the Minister's decision in Dublin to bring together as *Fóram na Gaeilge* (Irish Language Forum) two separate groups which had been established, one for *Gaeltacht* planning, the other as a general advisory group; the growing realisation that language maintenance may depend more and more on urban or other speakers and therefore for a redefinition of what *Gaeltacht* or Irish language community really means. This possibility, while hopeful, carries many corollaries for policy, both for community planning and planning for the nature of the language itself.

Another response to the retrenching *Gaeltacht* and to the possibility of redrawn boundaries has been the suggestion of a virtual global *Gaeltacht* that has no boundaries, being constantly redrawn in terms of interactive networks. While this may mean a continued future for the language in cyberspace, the idea has not grabbed the collective imagination of Irish speakers as a substitute for the reality, however fractured, that they already possess. While they use the internet for linguistic purposes, that appears to be the extent of their commitment to date.

The crucial importance of the *Gaeltacht* (as territorial language community) to the language, and

of the continued vitality of the language (both within the *Gaeltacht* and elsewhere) to the concept of the *Gaeltacht* are inextricably linked in a mutual life or death existence. One without the other appears unimaginable to the majority of Irish speakers, whether they are conscious of their own vital role in the process or not. Other concepts of *Gaeltacht* while helpful to the regional reality, are not substitutes for it.

SUMMARY ON THE STATE AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR IN NI

Language planning or language management is dependent on both a top down and a bottom up involvement. Arguments are currently being made by some in the sector on the nature of the relationship between State, statutory agencies and voluntary organisations in a participative democracy. The value of partnership towards co-planning is being recognised. In NI, the professional and innovative approach of the various voluntary agencies has been recognised both in the acceptance of their projects and, in official documents, of their arguments.

In the Republic, the *Coiste Comhairleach* (Advisory Committee), latterly combined with the Committee on the implementation of the recommendations of *Coiste Comhairleach na Gaeltachta* to form *Fóram na Gaeilge*, is fairly representative of both State, semi-State and voluntary operators or agents. Its remit is advice to the Minister with responsibility for the language on the 20 year strategy towards a functional bilingual society. While the task appears straightforward, the implications could prove daunting since Committee members will presumably be acting for the common, or greater, good. However, the very act itself of establishment of such a representative group is another advance in language management by the State in the Republic.

The difference in attitudes between NI and the Republic as reported above is interesting. In NI the majority expected language matters to be the responsibility of voluntary organisations, not the State. However, the Charter of the Council of Europe and both the Belfast and St. Andrews Agreements clearly put the onus on the State. The professionalism and innovation displayed by the voluntary sector in NI has earned the ear and the respect of officialdom. There is as yet no broadly similar *official* advisory body in NI as *Fóram na Gaeilge*. However, given the existing precedent of the involvement of civic society generally in NI through the Civic Forum and the need in all developed democracies for an active citizenship, the time would appear propitious to establish a new advisory/planning body for the Irish language representative of all shades of opinion, but particularly of both the voluntary sector and officialdom. The existing representative groups, *Iontaobhas Ultach* of all traditions and *Pobal* of Irish language voluntary activism, have proved efficacious precedents.

Table 8.1 NI Government Expenditure on the Irish Language**(a) NI Government Expenditure on Irish 2004–2005**

Departments	Projects	£ Sterling	Euro Equiv. (£1 = €1.49)
DHSSPS (Health, Social Services, Public Safety)	NIPPA Childhood Fund (19 Projects): <i>Naiscoil</i> (12); <i>An Droichead</i> (2); <i>Parents</i> (3) <i>Scoil</i> (1); <i>Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta</i> (1)	175,803	261,946
DE (Education)	Capital expenditure	9,235,774	
	Irish-medium Units & Playgroups	640,000	
	Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta	423,000	
	Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta	420,000	
		10,718,774	15,970,973
DEL (Employment & Learning)	Forbairt Feirste (Belfast Institute Further Education)	71,237	106,143
DFP (Finance & Personal)	EU Division	273,290	407,202
DSD (Social Development)	Core Funding	270,414	402,917
DCAL (Culture, Arts & Leisure)	Linguistics Operations Branch <i>Colmcille</i>	178,879	266,530
	Arts Branch <i>Annual Support Programme</i> (organisations)	272,000	405,280
	Lottery Supported Projects	226,672	337,741
	Culture & Language Diversity Policy Branch	23,829	35,505
		701,380	1,045,056
	Total for all Departments	12,210,898	18,194,238

Table 8.1 NI Government Expenditure on the Irish Language**(b) NI Government Expenditure 2005–2006**

Department incl. associated agencies	Interpretation & Translation	Programmes	£ Sterling Total	Euro (£1=€1.49) Total
NIO	481	0	481	717
OFMFDM	2,741	0	2,741	4,084
DE	19,349	12,875,657	12,895,006	19,213,559
DCAL	20,801	3,805,851	3,826,652	5,701,712
DARD	3,391	0	3,391	5,053
DEL	0	69,897	69,897	104,147
DETI	391	0	391	583
DFP	900	234,391	235,291	350,584
DHSSPS	43,757	42,212	85,969	128,094
DOE	7,290	0	7,290	10,862
DRD	436	0	436	650
DSD	0	795,959	795,959	1,185,979
Total for all Depts.	99,537	17,823,967	17,923,504	26,706,024 <i>circa</i>
Revised Total (Broadcasting Fund @ 2,999,874 subtracted)			14,923,630	22,236,209 <i>circa</i>

Table 8.2 BBC Trust: Comparison of Indigenous Languages Provision (2007)

	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	
	<i>Gaelic</i>	<i>Welsh</i>	<i>Irish</i>	<i>Ulster-Scots</i>
% of Population with knowledge of language	2% (Census 2001)	28% (Census 2001)	10% (Census 2001)	2% (Estimate)
BBC TV Output hours 2006/07	196	524	17	5
BBC Radio Output hours 2006/07	2930	8164	260	73
Other Market Provision (Estimate)	– Tele-G (digital) 1 hour daily – STV – 35.5 p.a.	S4C 82 hours weekly	– TG4 8 hours daily – RTÉ TV Radio 1 & 2, 1–2 hours weekly	N/A
Total TV Output (2006/07)	595.5	4788	2989	5
Total Radio Output (2006/07)	2930	8164	312	73

Table 8.3 Funding for the Arts in Irish (NI)

(a) Funding: Irish Language Clients 2003–2004 (NI Arts Council)

NI Arts Council		£ Sterling
Arts Development Fund	Lá (<i>twice-weekly literary supplement</i>)	27,200
	Open House (<i>writer-in-residence at festival</i>)	2,700
	Aisling Ghéar (<i>theatre company: audience development business plan</i>)	15,000
	Columba Initiative (now Colmcille) (<i>with Republic & Scotland: drama in education</i>)	5,000
	POBAL (<i>council of community organisations: roadshow Irish arts</i>)	9,815
	Total (£ Sterling) 59,715	
Arts Centres / Events	Cultúrlann (<i>Centre, Belfast</i>)	130,000
	Bláthanna (<i>Centre in Gaeláras, Derry</i>)	25,000
	An Droichead (<i>Events, Belfast</i>)	39,258
Total 194,258		
Literature / Writing	Irish writer-in-residence (<i>Queen's University; University of Ulster</i>)	9,000
	An tUltach (<i>magazine</i>)	6,000
Total 15,000		
Theatre	Aisling Ghéar	65,000
	Once-off Sustainability Grant	15,000
Total 80,000		
Grand Total (2003–2004) 348,973		

Table 8.3 Funding for the Arts in Irish

(b) Funding for the Arts in Irish: Expenditure 2004–2005 (Source DCAL)

DCAL		£ Sterling	€ euro
Linguistics Operation Branch	Colmcille	178,879	266,530
Arts Branch			
<i>Annual support programme (organisations)</i>		277,000	412,730
Bláthanna Arts (<i>Gaeláras, Derry</i>)		25,000	—
Cultúrlann (<i>Belfast</i>)		145,000	—
Aisling Ghéar (<i>theatre company, Belfast</i>)		65,000	—
An tUltach (<i>magazine</i>)		6,000	—
Lá (<i>newspaper</i>)		27,000	—
Writer-in-residence (<i>University of Ulster</i>)		9,000	—
Lottery Supported Projects		226,672	337,741
Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain (<i>Belfast</i>)		10,000	—
An Droichead (<i>Belfast</i>)		40,500	—
Ababú (<i>theatre company</i>)		135,000	—
POBAL (<i>community forum</i>)		5,000	—
Compántas Amharclainne (<i>a theatre company</i>)		3,983	—
Comhchoiste na Gaeilge (<i>North Antrim</i>)		27,189	—
Scannán (<i>film</i>) Aisling Ghéar		5,000	—
Culture & Language Diversity Policy Branch		23,829	35,505
Broadcasting Fund		4,565	—
Gaeltacht Quarter		19,264	—
Total (2004–2005) (Arts Branch only)		£503,672	€750,471